EXPLORING TRANSITION INTO POSTGRADUATE STUDY:
HOW RELATIONSHIP MARKETING PRINCIPLES CAN BE APPLIED TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

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Abstract

Over the past twenty years, the number of students undertaking postgraduate taught (PGT) education in the UK has grown substantially, according to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) This is faster than the growth in the undergraduate (UG) sector over the same period (HESA, 2021).

Postgraduates make a significant and growing contribution to the UK economy and to the HE sector specifically. The growth in PGT student numbers represents a positive scenario for universities, most of whom are actively pursuing ways to grow their revenue and differentiate their income streams (Robertson, 2010). Postgraduates' ability to adjust to, and successfully engage with their studies is fundamental to their progression, achievement and satisfaction, all of which are important metrics for universities (Evans et al., 2018).

Following a detailed review of the literature, this thesis explores key aspects of students' PGT transition experience. It contributes to the theoretical body of research through the development of a conceptual model recommending appropriate relationship marketing strategies that HEIs can adopt to recruit, retain and support their PGT students through the transition process towards successful outcomes.

Employing a qualitative research methodology using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with PGT students, this research was undertaken within a Birmingham-based Business School. The findings outlined the importance of utilising relationship marketing activities with transitioning PGT students by HEIs to:

- Influence students' notions of quality and trust through reputation, rankings, accreditation and endorsements.
- Support students' commitment and loyalty using special treatment benefits.
- Establish early communications with students using CRM systems to develop a relationship at the applicant stage about the pedagogy and what to expect.
- Build a rapport, a sense of belonging and a learning community.
- Support academic and professional identity construction and satisfaction.
- Co-create learning and provide excellent service quality, ensuring retention and satisfaction.
- Encourage and support long term relationships with committed PGT students as alumni.

Keywords: Postgraduate, Transition, Relationship Marketing, Higher Education

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my dear, late father,

Dr Henry Howell Jones, MB ChB.

(1936 – 2013)

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List of Abbreviations

AACSB	Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
AMBA	Association of MBAs
CIHE	Council for Industry and Higher Education
CoP	Community of Practice
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
EQUIS	European Quality Improvement System
EU	European Union
e-WOM	Electronic Word of Mouth
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HESQUAL	Higher Education Service Quality
LDC	Learning Development Centre
PG	Postgraduate
PGT	Post graduate Taught
PTES	Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
REM	Relationship Effects Model
RM	Relationship Marketing
RQM	Relationship Quality Model
S-DL	Service-Dominant Logic
SIT	Social Identity Theory
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.0 Introduction to the thesis

This chapter introduces the thesis which consists of the following sections: background to the research, the aim and objectives of the research, the research contribution and the final section outlines the structure of the thesis. The thesis explores student transition into postgraduate study in the UK Higher Education sector.

1.1 Background to the research

Over the past twenty years, the number of students undertaking postgraduate education in the UK has grown substantially according to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), faster than the growth in the undergraduate (UG) sector over the same period (HESA, 2021). The number of taught postgraduate students in 2019/20 stood at 532,235, an increase of some 9% on the previous year (HESA, 2021). This figure represents 21% of the total Higher Education (HE) student population in the UK at that time, which was 2,352,385 (HESA 2021). These postgraduate students therefore represent a substantial proportion of the student body and a significant source of income for UK HE institutions, estimated to be approximately £39.9bn or 2.7% of GDP in 2015 (Towers and Towers, 2020). The subject area attracting the highest proportion of students in 2019/20 was Business and Administrative studies (HESA, 2021). This study will therefore solely focus upon this subject area and be conducted within a Business School based in the Birmingham area.

Postgraduate qualifications can be classified into those that are largely taught and those with a significant research component. A research degree typically involves a far greater amount of independent study and encourages the development of skills in advanced research and analysis that a taught postgraduate student would not be expected to acquire (Smith et al., 2010). This study will focus on postgraduate taught (PGT) programmes only.

Postgraduates make a significant and growing contribution to the UK economy and to the HE sector specifically. The growth in PGT student numbers shown above, represents a positive scenario for universities, most of whom are actively pursuing ways to grow their revenue and differentiate income streams (Robertson, 2010). Even with the rapid growth in this sector and the increasing importance of postgraduate students to UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), how well these students are able to cope with the transition between undergraduate and postgraduate levels of study has been relatively unexplored (Tobbell et al., 2010). Students' ability to adjust to, and successfully engage with, postgraduate study is fundamental to their progression, achievement and satisfaction, all of which are important metrics for universities (Evans et al., 2018).

Research into the transition into postgraduate study, and particularly those students undertaking taught master's degrees is very sparse (Heussi, 2012). Comparatively little is known about why students enter postgraduate study, how successfully they make the transition to postgraduate study, the factors associated with their entry and how HEIs can successfully market to, recruit and retain their postgraduate students. Employers of postgraduate students suggest that more could be done to ensure that postgraduates get the greatest benefit from their investment in PGT education and are well equipped to succeed in their chosen career (Universities UK, 2010). It is therefore important that we understand the students' pre-entry characteristics to PGT programmes such as their motives, expectations, and level of preparedness. This study seeks to explore the key aspects of students' PGT transition experience and to recommend appropriate marketing strategies that HEIs can adopt in order to recruit, retain and support their PGT students through to successful outcomes. This study will therefore report on the research conducted amongst those students who have recently commenced their PGT studies and those students who are nearing completion of their UG studies and are considering PGT studies as their next step. All students will be undertaking Business and Management programmes at the same Birmingham based Business School. This approach will ensure a consistency of the students' expectations of the institution.

1.1.1 Role of Marketing

The role of marketing has become increasingly important for UK HEIs over the past two decades. As HEIs were facing rapidly growing global competition (Maringe, 2010), they recognised that they needed to market themselves (Hemsley Brown and Oplatka, 2015). As a result, a growing body of literature developed about the transfer of the practices and concepts of marketing from other sectors to the HE sector (Gibbs, 2002). As Maringe (2006) observed,

> "*Higher education environments have become increasingly competitive and institutions have to compete for students in the recruitment markets*" (p. 466).

The competitive environment increasingly meant that retaining students became just as important as attracting and enrolling them (Helgesen, 2008). Ng and Forbes (2009) agreed that a marketing orientation could be helpfully adopted in the competitive global arena of HE, but only if the right philosophies are properly applied.

Much of the HE marketing literature demonstrates that HEIs have followed traditional marketing guidelines and generally practised a transactional approach (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). It has, however, been suggested that in order to ensure sustained success over the longer term HEIs need to recognise that student satisfaction and value-creation continues past the transactional point of student enrolment and payment of fees (Beneke and Human, 2010). Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003)

recommended that a relationship marketing (RM) approach should be adopted in the marketing of HE. As competition in the global HE sector intensified, Bowden (2011) proposed that RM approaches needed to increasingly be considered as the most appropriate means for an HEI to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. Helgesen (2008), suggested that whilst traditional marketing approached focus only on short term customer acquisition "offensive marketing", the RM concept in HE focuses on student retention or "defensive marketing" instead.

As UK HEIs are competing in an increasingly competitive global market for a share of PGT students, so understanding the student transition experience to PGT study is of crucial importance for the HEI (Morgan, 2014). If HEIs are successfully to continue to recruit and retain PGT students, then students' motivations, expectations and experiences need to be examined, acknowledged and addressed. Therefore, to contribute to gaps in the literature, this research aims to show how the application of RM principles can resolve these issues for HEIs by building long term sustainable relationships with their PGT students.

1.2 The Research

This research seeks to explore the issues around students' transition to PGT programmes, and discover, through the use of an RM approach, how their recruitment, retention, satisfaction and loyalty can be ensured. In order to meet the overall research aim, the following research objectives for this study were formulated:

- To examine the context within which transitioning students' motivations and choices of university and PGT programme are influenced using RM approaches.
- To ascertain how PGT students' expectations, experiences and self-identities are influenced during the transition process by RM approaches.
- To determine which RM activities and strategies support and retain transitioning PGT students towards satisfactory employment outcomes and long-term relationships with the university.

The context for the study is a Birmingham-based university (referred to as X university in this research). The research has been undertaken in three parts consisting of an exploratory qualitative case study design. The research questions to be addressed by the study were formulated to meet the aims and objectives of the study and were based on a detailed review of the literature on PGT transition and RM strategies related to HE.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter two critically reviews and synthesises the literature and theory related to student transition; to explore student motivations for undertaking PGT study, and their expectations and experiences as PGT learners. It reviews the potential challenges that students encounter and the changes to their identities as PGT learners are also considered. The development of key relationships and networks which students develop are explored, together with the impact of the services and levels of support they receive. The chapter ends with the development of an adapted framework for PGT students' transition, based on an existing theoretical model.

Chapter three critically reviews the HE marketing literature and specifically the relevance, applicability and extent to which RM provides a way for HEIs to support their PGT students through transition towards successful outcomes for both the student and the HEI. The chapter also presents a critical analysis of various RM models. The chapter concludes with the development of six research questions and the presentation of an amalgamated model for student transition which incorporates the RM principles outlined in the literature.

 Chapter four outlines the epistemological stance and methodological choices that have been made in this thesis. The research aims and objectives are revisited, and the case study research design used is justified. The final section of the chapter considers the fieldwork, how the primary research using qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted, and how secondary data was used.

Chapter five explains how the data collected in this investigation were analysed using a Thematic Analysis approach and presents a detailed analysis of the findings from the three individual studies.

Chapter six presents a cross-study comparison and discussion of the findings and a synthesis of the literature on student transition and the application of RM principles.

Chapter seven draws together conclusions from the research and presents recommendations for HEIs. The limitations of the study are considered together with suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2. Literature Review – Transition to PGT study

2.0 Introduction

According to Mateos-Gonzalez and Wakeling (2020) there is definitive evidence that those who hold a master's qualification will typically experience improved outcomes compared to those holding a first degree alone. In research undertaken by the UK Office for National Statistics (Sidhu and Payne, 2019) it can be seen that people with a postgraduate qualification will earn approximately £65,000 more across their lifetimes than those holding an undergraduate degree. According to Sidhu and Payne (2019), the lifetime earnings premium for someone with a master's degree over and above an undergraduate or equivalent degree has remained fairly stable over recent years, at around 9% to 11%. The UK government's most recent published labour market statistics (2020) show that post-graduates have seen the largest increase in median salary since 2018 (up by £2,000). This has increased the gap between graduates and post-graduates to £8,000, the largest it has been since 2007.

The advanced knowledge and capabilities of those holding postgraduate qualifications remain highly prized by business and the public sector (Smith et al., 2010). The skills and abilities of postgraduates were felt to be important in terms of dealing with major business challenges and driving innovation and growth. The ability of the UK HE sector to provide people skilled to this level is vitally important in attracting global businesses to locate their high-value operations in this country (Smith et al., 2010). Many companies benefit from employing graduates with postgraduate level qualifications. PGT programmes provide students with the necessary skills needed to work in a range of industries and provide a key role in the further development of putting postgraduate research into practice (Smith et al., 2010).

The growing number of students deciding to undertake PGT study in the UK appear to do so for a variety of personal reasons such as self-development, or to seek to differentiate themselves in the highly competitive graduate jobs market (Crouch and Goulding, 2013). Perhaps this is because the holding of an undergraduate degree has become increasingly ubiquitous, and the relative advantage it once bestowed on graduates entering the labour market is now decreasing (Wolf, 2002). It is, therefore, important to understand the process of PGT transition in detail, as Liu (2010) explains:

> *"it is important that we ask how well we understand the variations in students' pre-entry characteristics such as their motives, expectations and preparedness"*. (p. 812)

Despite the growth and increasing importance of postgraduates to HEIs, there are comparatively little, although now increasing, numbers of academic studies that address the factors that affect

students whilst making the transition to PGT programmes (Heussi, 2012). Research into this area has tended to focus on other periods of transition instead. Little research has been undertaken regarding students' continued study experiences following completion of their undergraduate degrees. According to Tobbell et al. (2010):

> "*in contrast to other types of educational transition, the transition to postgraduate study has not benefitted from a wide and diverse literature*" (p.261).

This situation might be due to the assumption that such a transition may be less demanding for students than the move to undergraduate study at university. As Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013) explained, a simple answer is possibly because postgraduate students have already been successful in making the transition to university in order to gain their undergraduate degree, so it is thought that they will continue to be successful at postgraduate level.

In order to address these issues, this chapter will review the academic literature relating to the key aspects of student transition. This chapter will therefore consider students' motivations to undertake PGT study, how prepared they are, and explore their expectations and perceptions whilst they undergo the transition process. Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) transition theory will be critically reviewed and applied to students' transition experiences of PGT study. Additionally, the literature relating to student identity will be considered as Briggs et al. (2012) suggest that HEIs need to help students develop their learner identities as they experience PGT transition. It is important that positive identities and appropriate behaviour strategies are developed by students and supported by HEIs to ensure successful outcomes.

2.1 Conceptualising transition

The concept of transition has its roots in psychology and was originally based on work conducted into bereavement, family crisis and depression (Parkes, 1988; Holmes and Rahe, 1967). According to Levinson (1986), some academics positioned the notion of transition within a developmental framework, within which key turning points can be delineated between periods of constancy. Finding a way through transition requires releasing aspects of the self, of former roles, and learning or taking on new roles. The move through a period of transition will inevitably require a person to take stock as they transfer into new roles (Goodman et al., 2006).

Schlossberg et al. (1995) defined transition as:

> *"a process over time that includes phases of assimilation and continuous appraisal"* (p. 53).

Sometimes transitions can involve momentous life events that require management of what can sometimes appear to be calamitous situations. Essential personal growth and latent potential can be

gained by addressing and dealing with these significant events (Brown and Lent, 2000). Transitions can be seen as occurring in stages, with each stage relating to the next for adaptation and successful adjustment. It is argued that periods of transition can offer a unique opportunity for growth and transformation (Bridges, 1980; Hudson, 1991; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Transition into HE environments of academic and student life may encompass various types of change. For many undergraduate students, starting at university is an intimidating "*leap into the unknown*" (McInnis et al, 1995). The abrupt change from the controlled environment of school or college and family life to an environment where they are expected to accept personal responsibility for both their academic and social aspects of their lives can be very stressful and cause great anxiety. Some students cope with this by simply not engaging and some may even drop out (Rickinson and Rutherford, 1995). It would seem that many students do not have a positive experience when starting university (Lowe and Cook, 2003). This could be attributable to a 'gap' between students' perceptions, expectations and their initial experiences (Parkinson and Forrester, 2004). Rowley et al (2008) explained that:

> "*mismatches between these expectations and actual experiences can lead to disengagement with the academic process*" (p.399).

2.2 Models and theories of student transition and student experience process

In this section, key models of the student transition process and student experience will be considered. These models include Morgan's (2013) Student Experience Practitioner Model (SET), Kift et al.'s (2010) Transition Pedagogy Model and Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) Transition theory.

2.2.1 The Student Experience Practitioner Model (Morgan, 2013)

Morgan (2013) developed this model to help students, regardless of the level of study entered, whether UG or PGT, or whether their study was full or part time. In this model, students are supported throughout their journey as learners, from the pre-arrival stage, whilst undergoing their period of study, and onwards into the process of leaving university and beyond. Therefore, every stage of their academic journey at an HEI is mapped, from the first contact made with the institution until they eventually complete their studies and possibly become alumni. The key stages outlined in this model include: First contact and admissions, Pre-arrival, Arrival and orientation, Introduction to study, Re-orientation and Reinduction through to Out duction (see Figure 2.1 below). These stages comprise a study journey throughout which university personnel should offer students suitably targeted support.

University services need to ensure that they offer a coordinated approach so that the required information and support are made available and accessible to their students in a consistent manner across all levels of study. Morgan (2013) suggests that HEIs devise a range of activities in order to encourage the engagement and training of staff in supporting the whole student experience.

Figure 2.1. Morgan's (2013) Student Experience Practitioner Model (SEM) (model adapted from p.45 in Morgan, M. (2013) *Supporting student diversity in Higher education - A practical guide,* Oxon: Routledge).
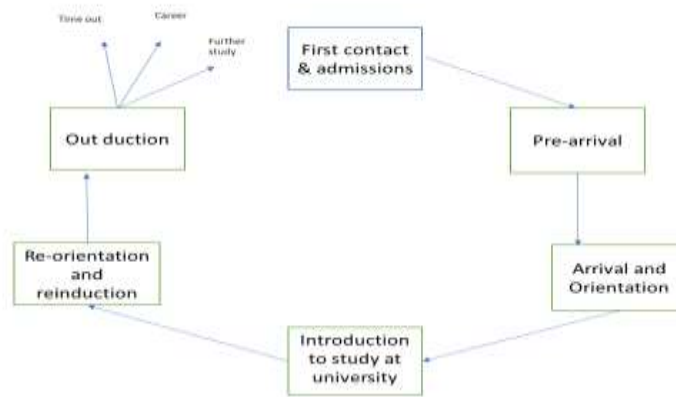
This is an excellent, more recently developed model which supports student transition, as it requires, at each of its stages, that students' requirements, needs and aspirations are supported and appropriately managed by HEIs. According to Thomas (2012) this is essential because students need to be engaged with their studies and a sense of belonging should be created to assist succeed in this endeavour. However, this model was not applied in this thesis because it was felt that gaining an understanding of the motivations and influences on the student decision to participate in PGT programmes specifically and in their particular choice of university and PGT programme, were key aspects of this study.

2.2.2 Kift et al.'s (2010) Transition Pedagogy Model

This model focuses explicitly upon the transition experience of first year undergraduate students at university. It was developed using an action research approach by Kift et al. (2010) at Queensland University of Technology (QUT). The aim of the study was to reduce rates of student attrition and to ensure student engagement in learning activities by newly starting students. The research was formulated on understanding that:

(i) Students need to be participants in the university experience in order that their outcomes are efficacious. Social and community interfaces are seen as beneficial. External commitments towards families and others needs to be supported and recognised but that the curricula should inspire, thrill and make students eager to work towards mastery of the curricula in their chosen subjects.

(ii) First year students have particular learning requirements due to the academic transition they are undergoing. Although starting from different points, students are on a journey towards being more autonomous and the first year should support them in this goal.

The Transition Pedagogy model (see Figure 2.2 below) was developed to highlight the importance of student engagement, offering appropriate student support and the importance of a providing a sense of belonging. This would be achieved through engaging curricular activities co-designed with students and implemented by partner academic and professional staff who were committed to optimising the first-year student experience. In this way it was felt that transition pedagogy would be truly student-focussed.

Figure 2.2 Kift et al.'s (2010) Transition Pedagogy Conceptual Model (model adapted from p.11 in Kift, S.; Nelson, K. and Clarke, J. (2010) Transition pedagogy: A third generation approach to FYE – A case study of policy and practice for the higher education sector, *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education,* Vol 1 (1) pp.1-20.)
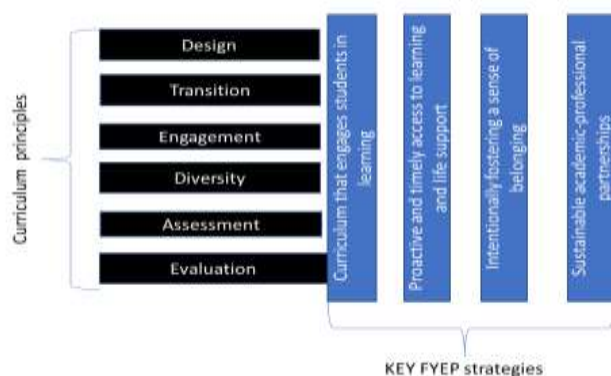
Whilst this research is excellent in terms of providing a model to support student transition experiences, it focuses specifically on the first year of undergraduate study at university and is not directly applicable to PGT student experiences. Therefore this model was not applied in this research.

2.2.3 Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) Transition theory

In this section Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) theory of transition will be considered within the context of student transition to PGT study, as it provides a conceptualisation of the transition process and a framework which can be used to examine multiple transition variables exploring students' experiences.

> ''*The transition framework is designed to depict the extraordinarily complex reality that accompanies and defines the human capacity to cope with change'' (p. 55).*

Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995) will be deployed in this research in order to clarify and describe the main elements that underpin the transition experience. This theory has been in existence since 1984 but has been revised and updated in various iterations until 2006 and again, most recently in 2012. The theory has been applied in a small variety of US based HE settings and different contexts, to include the following: transfer student athletes' perceptions of their transition experience (Flowers et al., 2014), the transition of diverse adult students (Schaefer, 2010), students transitioning through academic probation (Tovar and Simon, 2006) and the transition into retirement by faculty members (Goodman and Pappas, 2000). Whilst this theory was theory was initially established in support of adult development, it can also be helpfully applied to the context of HE transitions (Evans et al., 2010).

Goodman et al. (2006) offer a unifying and integrated model of transition based on the work of various theorists (Myerhoff, 1984; Ebaugh, 1988; Hudson, 1991, 1999; Bloch and Richmond, 1998; Bloch, 2004). Schlossberg et al. (2008) explain the first phase of the transition process is the "moving in" stage (please refer to the model at Figure 2.1 below) which occurs when people move into a new situation, such as into an educational environment, an assessment or a planning period. Students, for example, need to become familiar with the new rules, regulations, norms, and expectations of the system. Schlossberg et al. (2008) posit that this stage may prompt anxieties about moving onto a new campus and selecting and registering for classes. Goodman et al. (2006) therefore advise that institutions (such as universities) need carefully to consider and plan their students' induction and socialisation processes: the process designed to help individuals know what is expected of them.

The next phase or the "moving through" period can begin once participants "know the ropes" (Anderson et al., 2011). Once they are in this new situation, the participants will confront issues such as how to balance their activities with other parts of their lives and consider how to be supported and challenged throughout their journey (Schlossberg et al., 2008). As the transition process can be long, learners may need some support in order to sustain their energy and commitment. This in-

between period can also lead to the participants questioning whether they can commit to the transition experience or even complete it.

Anderson et al. (2011) delineate the final phase of transition as the "moving out" stage; the end of the transition period when participants begin to think about what comes next. Leaving familiar surroundings and ways of functioning and interacting can lead to disequilibrium. Ebaugh (1988) found that role exit is a process of disengagement from an existing role that is key to one's identity, and the establishment of an identity in a new role which takes account of one's old role. Gradually participants become aware of their changing situation, in which current relationships, assumptions, and routines may come to an end, and that new ones need to evolve. For students this process occurs following graduation. Their transition process can then be said to have been finally integrated and completed (Goodman et al., 2006).

Anderson et al. (2011) determine transition theory to consider both internal, self-related strategies, as well as external situation and support transition variables. Transition theory emphases the meaning systems developed by the individual as they experience the transition process. The theory considers that transition is any event that changes people's relationships, routines, assumptions and roles, requiring them to learn new patterns of behaviour that may or may not be effective (Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg et al., 1995). The key factor is that the individual's perception of the transition is more important than the actual transition itself (Anderson et al., 2011).

The transition framework developed by Schlossberg et al. (1995) therefore consists of three parts:

1. Approaching Transition: Transition Identification and Transition Process (Moving In phase).
2. Taking Stock of Coping Resources: The 4-S System (Moving Through phase).
3. Taking Charge: Strengthening Resources (Moving Out phase).

2.2.3.1 Stage 1: Approaching transition

According to Anderson et al. (2011), the approaching transition stage means considering the importance a transition has in terms of the type of transition it is. It is vital to ascertain how the student feels about the transition. It is also important to understand the context and impact of the transition. Context considers the relationship of the individual to the transition and also the setting for the change (Anderson et al., 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1995; Evans et al., 1998). The impact of the transition is the amount by which it changes the student's relationships, roles, routines and assumptions (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Transitions are important in terms of how they affect the individual's ''assumed world'' (Parkes, 1971), this involves both interpreting the past and setting expectations for the future.

2.2.3.2 Stage 2: Taking stock using the 4 S system

This has been called the "Taking Stock of Transition" stage. It is the second stage in the transition process.

Anderson et al. (2011) explain that in dealing with a period of transition

''individuals have both assets and liabilities, resources and deficits, as they experience transition'' (p. 48).

During a period of transition, those involved are continually evaluating and re-evaluating their personal coping mechanisms and resources. In this "Taking Stock of Coping Resources" stage, Schlossberg et al, (1995) outline the four key elements that can be used in assessing the resources one has in coping with transition, to include: situation, self, support, and strategies; known as the 4 S system. Chickering and Schlossberg (1995) determined that no one element is necessary in order to deal with change, as the resources and deficits can change over time and individuals can take action to turn deficits into assets. The 4 Ss are determined (Chickering and Schlossberg, 1995; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988, Schlossberg, 1990; Schlossberg, et al. 1989; Schlossberg et al., 1995) to be:

Situation – the situation at the time of transition and how the student views it.

Self – who the student is, their identity, personal and psychological characteristics.

Support – the source(s) of support available to the student in transition.

Strategies – refer to the ways and functions of coping to control, avoid, or prevent stressful situations.

2.2.3.3 Stage 3: Taking charge

The "Taking charge" component is the final stage outlined in this transition theory. This aspect is underpinned through a change in role, behaviour, learning and perception, a shift in the balance of assets and deficits, (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The taking charge process confirms that the student is taking control of the transition and is dealing with it.

Figure 2.3. Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) Model of Transition. (Model adapted from p.39 in Anderson, M.L., Goodman J. and Schlossberg, N. K. (2012) *Counselling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory in a diverse world*. 4th edition, New York: Springer Publications).

Moving In   Moving Through   Moving Out

Approaching transition   The Individual Transition   Changed
Events or non-events
resulting in change   Potential resources 4S's
                                   assets/liabilities
- Type   Behaviour
- Impact   Situation   Support   Role
- Context   Learning
                                                                            Perceptions

                             Self   Strategies

The transition process changing reactions over time
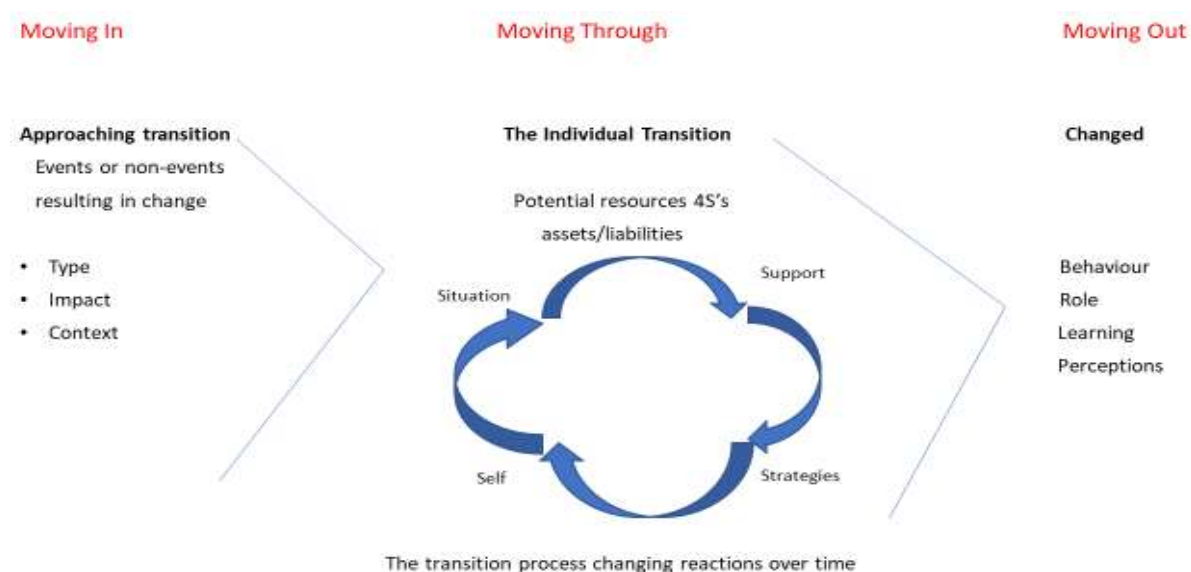
2.3 Evaluation of the applicability of Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) Transition Theory

Assisting students through their transition to PGT study at university is vital to promote their eventual success. Most universities offer induction programmes which aid incoming students in understanding their new university environment, and other services such as study skills and other campus resources are provided too (Barclay, 2017). The use of Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) transition model can add an important aspect to the support of transitioning students. According to Barclay (2017), the model could be used as a transition assessment tool to guide orientation programmes using students' self-reflection and self-exploration of their personal characteristics and resources that might help them understand the transition process. Whilst this is true, the Schlossberg et al. (1995) model was not developed specifically to apply to PGT students' transition and perhaps does not provide a sufficiently detailed insight into their particular motivations, actions and experiences as PGT learners. It therefore has some limited application in its original conception within this study (please see Figure 2.1 above). The application of the model does have some resonance for this study however, as it supports the consideration as to how PGT students are moving in, moving through and moving out of their transition journey. It is, however, necessary to look at each stage in a more detailed and focused manner in order to gain greater insights into the PGT student transition experience. As Coneyworth et al. (2019) argue, there is a real need for HEIs to gain a better understanding of their PGT students, to focus on how their motivations, expectations and processes of adaptation and acculturation impact upon their learning experiences and successful transition to PGT level studies.

Flowers et al. (2014) explained that academics have sought over time to offer various models in order to comprehend how students cope with elements of the transition process. Their research was developed, in the main, to include aspects related specifically to undergraduate student transition, retention (or attrition) and eventual success at university (Flowers et al., 2014). These theoretical models were constructed using a variety of student variables and units of analysis. In general, the studies considered internally focused elements relating to transition such as student motivation, perceptions and behaviour, and also those more externally focused support elements such as social networks, integration, culture, institutional structures and processes (Flowers et al., 2014).

In this thesis, the literature relating to both the internal and external elements relating to student transition will be outlined and applied to the PGT student transition experience in the following sections. Please refer to the Appendix 1 Literature Table for the key academic studies reviewed in relation to student transition to PGT programmes.

2.4 Moving in phase (Approaching transition) – Motivations, influences, choices and communications

In this section of the literature review, the concepts and literature are identified as connected to PGT students "moving in" to the period of transition (please refer back to section 2.2). In this phase, the type of transition, its importance and context should be acknowledged (Anderson et al., 2011).

Based on the review of the literature on PGT student transition, the following themes can be identified and classified as the students' pre-transition "moving in" phase. The themes include: **student motivations to undertake PGT studies** (Donaldson and McNicholas, 2004; Harvey et al., 2004; Pires, 2009; Lui, 2010; Morgan, 2013; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014; Neves and Lehman, 2019), **influences on their choices, including the reputation of the HEI** (Hesketh and Knight, 1999; Baden-Fuller et al., 2000; Tight, 2000; Schultz et al., 2001; Donaldson and McNicholas, 2004; Smith, 2006; Morgan, 2013; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014; Neves and Lehman, 2019), **branding** (de Chernatony, 2001; Alessandri et al., 2006; Blanton, 2007; Chapleo, 2008; Waeras and Solbakk, 2009), **students' previous experience of university** (Biggs, 1996; Prosser and Trigwell, 1999; Symons, 2001; Cluett and Skene, 2006; O' Donnell et al., 2009; West, 2012; Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013), **importance of early communication and induction** (Owens and Loomes, 2010; Palmer and Koenig-Lewis, 2011; Coneyworth et al., 2019) **family and other influences** (Mattson and Barnes, 2009; Johnston, 2010; Slack et al., 2012; Dietrich and SalmaAro, 2013; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014), **the costs of the programme and how students finance their PGT studies** (Griffith and Rothstein, 2009; Donaldson and McNicholas, 2012; Lindley and Machin, 2013; Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson, 2014; Wu,

2014; Morgan, 2014; Wakeling et al., 2017; Mateos-Gonzalez and Wakeling, 2020) and **location issues** (Donaldson and McNicholas, 2012; Stuart, 2002).

2.4.1 Student motivations to do PGT study

Donaldson and McNicholas (2004) found in their study that a key motivating factor for students choosing to undertake PGT studies was the opportunity to enhance their career prospects. Respondents wanted PGT programmes that clearly related to work roles, providing a theoretical perspective, and enabling them to undertake the work roles effectively (Donaldson and McNicholas, 2004). Harvey et al. (2005) found professional self-development to be a main driver, and Liu (2010) agreed that the improved employment and career prospects that could be gained through the development of additional skills were important reasons to undertake PGT programmes. Personal interest in the discipline was also was also found to be a strong motivator (Neves and Lehman, 2019).

Morgan (2013) explained that career objectives were by no means the only reason for undertaking PGT study. In her study, the most popular goal given by students was to improve knowledge of their chosen subject. In research conducted by Mellors-Bourne et al. (2014), it was found that the aspirations of those students considering PGT study mostly consisted of a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Many held strong personal interests in a particular subject together with a felt need to undertake more learning at university. However, Mellors-Bourne et al. (2014) commented that most prospective PGT students do have career-related motivations, in terms of furthering their present career or in their wish to change it. Pires (2009) however felt it was often difficult to separate students' personal interests from their professional ones, conceding that in fact, both were important factors in motivating students to take up PGT study.

2.4.2 Influences on student choices

Whilst a good deal of research has been conducted on undergraduate student choices, much less has been directed towards postgraduates. It would seem that in some cases PGT students choose an institution and then the programme, whilst others choose the specific programme of study first (Donaldson and McNicholas, 2004). Some key influencing factors affecting PGT student's choices according to Hesketh and Knight (1999) included: university reputation, information, costs and finances.

2.4.2.1 University reputation

The PTES UK wide survey (2019) reported that the reputation of institution and subject area were very important factors for many students in deciding where and what to study. According to the PTES

survey reported by Neves and Lehman (2019) over half (53%) of PGT students chose where to study based on the reputation of the HEI (Neves and Lehman, 2019).

In the study conducted by Mellors-Bourne et al. (2014), it was found that students typically cited the reputation of the institution as their main reason for choosing it. Mellors-Bourne et al. (2014) also commented that postgraduates preferred to pursue their programme at prestigious or well-regarded institutions. Hesketh and Knight (1999) found that the reputation of the HEI, either in terms of the institution, a department or its academic staff, could all be significant in informing student choice of where to study. In order to satisfy students' requirements, HEIs should be aware of the perceptions that students have of both their institution and its programmes (Donaldson and McNicholas, 2004), as in some cases PGT students first choose an institution and then a programme, whereas other students might wish to choose the programme first.

According to Morgan (2013), the HEI's teaching reputation is an important factor for PGT students' choice of institution, although its research reputation was not deemed to be a particularly significant factor. In their study, Donaldson and McNicholas (2004) found that the overall reputation of the institution was an important factor for PGT students, and that accreditation was the most important aspect affecting their choice of institution. Accreditations for Business Schools include those from AACSB, AMBA and EQUIS. According to the Complete University Guide (2020) accreditation is an indication of quality control and consistency, suggesting that a programme meets certain high international standards. It would seem that, in what is an increasingly marketised environment for universities, the importance of rankings and league tables in the measurement of quality has become an important factor influencing PGT students' choice (Tight, 2000). The findings of the UK-wide PTES survey (2019) outlined that those PGT students who make their choice of HEI based upon notions of quality and reputation tend to end up being most the satisfied students. Some students, however, are looking beyond the traditional institutional academic reputation and are now also considering the support structures available to them within HEIs when deciding upon a PGT study destination (Smith, 2006).

The Complete University Guide publishes league tables and rankings on UK HEIs. In a study conducted by i-graduate (2013), it was suggested that national league tables are used by prospective postgraduates to help them make judgements about HEIs, together with their personal experiences or recommendations from others. Baden-Fuller et al. (2000) explain that league table rankings reflect and create reputations, whilst Schultz et al. (2001) found evidence to suggest that the ranking of an organisation can have a lasting impact on the reputation of the institution in question.

Linked to the concept of reputation is that of branding. This, according to de Chernatony, (2001) refers to how the perceived value of an entity can be augmented using a mix of both emotional and practical values. The importance of owning a distinctive brand identity is critical for universities in order to communicate their points of differentiation within an increasingly crowded and competitive global marketplace (Alessandri et al., 2006; Blanton, 2007; Chapleo, 2008; Waeras and Solbakk, 2009) in order to attract students (Judson et al., 2009). Fickes (2003) argued that a university brand name communicates a certain kind of academic excellence. An HEI's brand is defined by Bennett and Ali-Choudhury (2009) as:

> *"a manifestation of the institution' s features that distinguish it from others, reflect its capacity to satisfy students' needs, engender trust in its ability to deliver a certain type and level of higher education, and help potential recruits to make wise enrolment decisions" (*pp. 85 – 86).

The importance of reputation, image and branding factors impacting on student choices of HEI will be considered further in the next chapter.

2.4.2.2 Previous experience of university and prior learning

It is important to consider the prior-learning experiences of students and how the transition from one context to another will be affected by their prior experience (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999). According to Biggs (1996) the learner will bring a set of accumulation of assumptions, motives, intentions and prior knowledge with them that is likely to affect their learning situation and can influence the value of the learning that may then take place.

Some students choose to follow a traditional route from undergraduate into postgraduate study (O' Donnell et al. 2009). However, those who follow this route sometimes do not necessarily find the transition more straightforward or easy. In a study by West (2012) it was discovered that 64% of students with an undergraduate degree found the transition to PGT study difficult. This finding is rather at odds with the notion of PGT students as "expert students", which as Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013) explain, may be due to the incorrect assumption that, as PGT students had already successfully navigated their way through undergraduate transition through to graduation where perhaps it is incorrectly assumed that students can steer their way through and cope in the postgraduate environment.

More recently the difficulties present in the transition to postgraduate study for taught post-graduate students have been subject to research (Cluett and Skene, 2006; O'Donnell et al., 2009; O'Neill et al., 2007; Symons, 2001). This has consistently shown that postgraduate students are unprepared for their studies in Higher Education (HE) (O'Donnell et al., 2009. Some research has

focussed on the difficulties experienced by PGT students during their transition to postgraduate study (Cluett and Skene, 2006; O'Donnell et al., 2009; Symons, 2001). The findings have shown that PGT students are on the whole unprepared for postgraduate study in Higher Education (HE) (O'Donnell et al., 2009). Cluett and Skene's (2006) study suggested that PGT students felt that their previous experience had not equipped them particularly well for this level of study.

West (2012) suggests that the transition to postgraduate study is a significant transition, not an easy experience, according to most of the student respondents who participated in her study, suggested that greater academic support is needed to address students' learning needs. West (2012) explained how important it was to address the potential difficulties apparent in the transition to PGT study and emphasised the need for effective, timely actions to help prepare students for the transition.

2.4.2.3 Family, peer and other influences

Research explored the important influence that family plays in supporting HE decisions (Johnston, 2010). The contribution that family makes in HE decision-making, and in particular the role of parents, is most likely to be very different in supporting students' decisions about entering UG and PGT studies (Mellors-Bourne et al, 2014). Whilst it can be seen that parents will play a key role in the transition of younger adults into UG education (Dietrich and SalmelaAro, 2013), it seems certain that the parental input becomes less significant as the student grows older. The family still be a key influencing factor, however, and it is possible that spouses, children and parents can exert some influence on PGT choice (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014). However, this has yet to be fully explored in the literature.

The influence of peers who have experience of HE, has been highlighted as an important factor in student decision making (Johnston, 2010). This has resulted in a keen interest on the part of HEIs in the use of online media to communicate with prospective PGT students (Mattson and Barnes, 2009). Slack et al. (2012) considered how information is utilised by students. They determined that students preferred information that has come to them via social networks, as that they feel they can trust it (from people they know, such as peers or family) and they will tend to mistrust glossy written communications, such as university prospectuses or websites, which they perceive as trying to manipulate them. Students are apparently more likely to trust the information provided by others they meet as casual acquaintances, such as other students at open days (Slack et al., 2012). According to Mellors-Bourne et al (2014) this may suggest that HEIs need to work harder to personalise the information presented to students.

2.4.2.4 Early communication

The study conducted by Coneyworth et al (2019) reported that anxieties associated with the transition to postgraduate level studies may be experienced by both UK and international students. It has been suggested that pre-arrival information about travel, accommodation, and shopping facilities for clothing and food, can help PGT students in orienting themselves when they move to a new academic environment (Owens and Loomes, 2010).

The early pre-enrolment and pre-transition stage of students' relationship with a university is vitally important as it is most likely to affect their subsequent relationship with it (Palmer and Koenig-Lewis, 2011). It seems that most universities will most often measure prospective students' satisfaction with the enrolment process, but their feelings about the university prior to enrolment is an under researched area (Palmer and Koenig-Lewis, 2011). In a study into PGT transition conducted by the University of Leeds (2015), PGT students felt that communication with them prior to arrival was very important and it would appear that some, who had accepted a place some months prior to the commencement of their programme, had experienced a real gap in communication. It was reported that PGT students believed that having regular updates from the University would support them and make them feel more welcome and help in preparing them for their programmes (University of Leeds, PGT Transition Programme Report, 2015).

2.4.2.5. Costs and financing PGT studies

In a study conducted by Wu (2014) of overseas students from China who chose to undertake postgraduate study in the UK, it seems that cost factors were important in determining their choice of HEI. The HEIs in cities that had lower tuition fees and a lower cost of living compared to London, received interest particularly amongst students who were less attracted by university rankings.

For UK students, the provision of postgraduate loans since 2016 has been a driving force behind an observed increase in home based PGT students enrolling for UK based programmes (HESA, 2018). Research shows that PGT participation rates have been growing over the past few years (Lindley and Machin, 2013; Morgan, 2014). However, this growth has not been evident across all backgrounds or socio-economic groups (Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson, 2013). The possible reason suggested for this was access to finance (Mateos-Gonzalez and Wakeling, 2020). Lindley and Machin's (2013) research found that those born in the top earnings quintile were more likely to acquire such qualifications and that holders then continued to enjoy an earnings premium.

Up until 2016, little financial support was available for UK students who wished to undertake PGT studies (Mateos-Gonzalez and Wakeling, 2020). Some researchers predicted that the debt aversion

among graduates from lower socio-economic groups, particularly evident following the introduction of higher variable tuition fees for undergraduates, would result in the lower take-up of PGT places by less economically advantaged groups (Mateos-Gonzalez and Wakeling, 2020). Griffith and Rothstein (2009) felt there was some debt aversion amongst students from poorer backgrounds and this affected their choice of where to study but had not necessarily influenced the subject they were going to study. They suggested that students from lower income backgrounds were therefore more likely to attend a local university (Griffith and Rothstein, 2009). However, Wakeling et al. (2017) found in their study, that it was not debt aversion as such, but not having access to credit that was the main issue for lower income groups. Mateos-Gonzalez and Wakeling (2020) posit that the UK postgraduate loan policy will support students from backgrounds who are less able to access other financial means to a greater extent, thereby fulfilling apparent latent demand for PGT study.

2.4.2.5 Location issues

In a quantitative study undertaken by the Opinion Panel (2011), a list of attributes rated as 'very important' by PGT applicants was compiled. For mature HE entrants, 41% rated the geographical location as a very important non-academic factor that had influenced their university choice. Donaldson and McNicholas (2012) suggested that part-time or more mature PGT students tended to choose locally based programmes that were affordable but of reasonable quality. In addition, it seems that students from poorer backgrounds often have limited money to travel, so for them, an awareness of local provision is highly important (Stuart, 2002).

2.5 Moving through phase (Situation) – Expectations, feelings and preparation

As students begin to move through to the next stage of the transition process, it is important for them to become familiar with the situation, including new rules, norms and expectations of their PGT programme and HEI, if they are to be successful (Schlossberg et al.,2008). This section will explore the first element of the "moving in phase" (Goodman et al., 2006) to include situational elements.

According to the literature on student transition, this early 'moving in' transitional phase includes consideration of the following key factors: **students' expectations of transition** (Jackson et al., 2000; Bennett and Kottasz, 2006; O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007; Krause and Coates, 2008; Drennan and Clarke 2009; Heussi, 2012; Coneyworth et al., 2019; Lobo and Gurney, 2014; Morgan and Direito, 2016; Smith, 2016; Bamber et al., 2017; Gbadamosi, 2018), **feelings** (Symons, 2001; Mather, 2007; Burch, 2008; Seah, 2008; Winter and Dinsmore, 2010; Owens and Loomes, 2010, Tobbell et al., 2010; Heussi. 2012, Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013), **preparedness** (Bamber et al., 2017) **early experiences** (Brown, 2007; Melles, 2009; O'Donnell et al. 2009; Masterman and Shuyska, 2012; Heussi, 2013; Kember et al., 2014, Coneyworth et al. 2019) and **issues with self-directed, autonomous learning**

(Hesketh and Knight, 1999; Watkins and Biggs, 2001; Garrison and Kanuka, 2004; Hounsell et al., 2005; Littlejohn and Pegler, 2007; Browne and Garrison, 2007; Kingston and Forland, 2008; O'Donnell et al, 2013; Tobbell et al, 2010; Coates and Dickenson, 2012; Masterman and Shuyska, 2012; Heussi, 2013; Bamber et al., 2017; Coneyworth et al., 2019), **assessment** (Tobbell et al., 2010; West, 2012), **group work issues** (Gabriel and Griffiths, 2008; Holmes, 2005; Parks and Raymond, 2004 and Ramsey and Mason, 2004) and **feedback** (Tsai, 2020; Dunworth and Sanchez, 2016; Man et al., 2018 and Dickson et al., 2019). These factors for PGT learners will now be explored.

2.5.1 Student expectations

In a longitudinal, mixed methods study of undergraduate transition, Jackson et al (2000) were able to determine four levels of student expectations about university. These levels were identified as being optimistic, fearful, prepared and complacent. They found that those students with fearful expectations tended to suffer more stress and depression than the students with the other types of expectation (Jackson et al., 2000). The authors considered that transition could be difficult for many students, so therefore an attempt to identify the predictors of adjustment was important.

Bennett and Kottasz (2006) reported in their study that large differences between the hopes, predictions, perceptions and the actual reality, can then affect students' satisfaction. Even though all taught postgraduate students have been successful in obtaining an undergraduate degree and have experienced being taught within the higher education system, it is therefore often assumed that they are mostly familiar with the expectations of study (Heussi, 2012). Coneyworth et al. (2019) has suggested however, that this is not necessarily the case, and that students entering PGT programmes frequently experience anxiety and express concerns directly related to the transition into such programmes (Bamber et al., 2017; Gbadamosi, 2018; Morgan and Direito, 2016). The lack of clarity around PGT expectations is reflected in the dearth of research on what has been called, *'the most under-researched of all degree levels'* (Drennan and Clarke 2009). Lobo and Gurney (2014) considered that the situation offered a raised sense of awareness that students have expectations, and this could offer an opportunity for collaboration and reflection on the part of staff.

Smith (2016) posited that it was important that programme leaders did not take for granted that they knew best what students expected from their PGT studies, rather it was important to question what students expected and then work to meet their expectations. In fact, Lobo and Gurney (2014) suggest that all staff working at universities should be involved in this process, not only the academic staff. They felt that,

> "*the link between met expectations and student satisfaction carries implications for the professional practice of University marketing teams, programme designers, education consultancy services and career advisors*" (p.747)

Krause and Coates (2008) outline that to support the easy transition of students, HEIs should develop both programmes and activities that encourage both the academic and social aspects of becoming a PGT student. This can help student awareness of the expectations of the PGT programme and support them to become PGT students (Krause and Coates, 2008). It is vital for students to experience some early success based on their knowledge and mastery of PGT academic practice to support their connection with the HE community and will improve their feelings of self-efficacy and belonging (O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007).

The expectations of all PGT students cannot be presumed to be the same. The expectation levels of students of divergent ethnicities and backgrounds may well be very different. Lobo and Gurney (2014) argue that expectations of PGT study by international students are more likely to diverge from the actual reality than the expectations of domestic students. They explain that international students are more likely to see themselves as customers of the HE service, as opposed to students.

Smith (2016) considers that this belief can lead to some students having unrealistic expectations which are usually not met. The reasons for this could be due to previous educational experiences, recruitment information received from agents or the HEI itself, or even the amount of fees they are paying to the HEI (Smith, 2016).

2.5.2 Feelings about PGT transition

Heussi (2012) highlighted the difficulties that PGT students have in engaging and adjusting to their postgraduate studies. The students in her study expressed their low satisfaction with their transition experiences. Symons (2001) also reported some similar findings because many PGT students found difficulties at the start of the programme and felt they needed more direction to begin with. Any notions held by HEIs that transitioning PGT students are 'experts' due to their prior successful undergraduate experiences plainly contrasted to their own expressions as being 'confused and struggling' (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013). The requirement for the PGT student to take increased responsibility for their own learning, together with an increased need for independent study, will often necessitate the student to undergo identity shifts in their personal practices (Tobbell et al., 2010).

According to Owen and Loomes (2010) the difficulties can be exacerbated for international PGT students, as the mix of intense transitional demands made upon them can lead to them feeling a lack of connectedness, unhappiness, dissatisfaction, isolation and alienation, guilt, anger and tension (Mather, 2007; Seah, 2008). Given the deep, and often difficult changes required of them, it seems unsurprising that some international PGT students in particular, commonly fail two or more of their subjects in their first term of study (Burch, 2008).

Owen and Loomes (2010) argue that given these issues, HEIs should provide a range of social, learning support and integration activities for their PGT students. This is necessary to ensure the success, safety and security of students, to enhance their satisfaction with the PGT experience and the overall retention of PGT students on their programmes.

2.5.3 Student preparedness for PGT study

Bamber et al. (2017) felt that staff assumptions about what students are able to do at PGT level and about how they should be best helped to reach this level, is mostly not identified in the literature. They explain that this lack of clarity around expectations may lead some PGT students to feel ill-prepared for, and concerned, about entering PGT study (Bamber et al., 2017). Whilst student expectations about the requirements of PGT level study becomes somewhat clearer as they move through their programme; the short length of most UK PGT programmes (only one or two years), suggesting that some support early on in the transitional process would assist students in making the most of their PGT learning opportunities (Bamber et al., 2017).

2.5.4 The challenges of the PGT learning experience

O'Donnell et al.'s (2009) research explored transition into postgraduate study, finding that students' personal experiences of teaching and practices within the university do not always reflect what they expect at postgraduate level. In their study, they found that the differences, especially in terms of the needs of each student was vast. They argued that those HEIs that treat their students as a homogenous group are overlooking the needs of some PGT students (O'Donnell et al., 2009).

According to Coneyworth et al. (2019), a significant number of both home and international PGT students reported difficulties in understanding what was expected of them as a PGT students. In Heussi's (2013) study, many students expressed the need for more introductory support. More explanation by HEI providers was needed to ensure that students were happy with the transition and that students knew what they needed to do in order to be successful (Heussi, 2013).

Coneyworth et al. (2019) also felt that expectations needed further exploration in order better to manage the students' transition to what is a more intense period of higher-level study. Brown (2007) suggested that expectations needed to be clearly communicated to the students early on in the academic year, in terms of studying and learning approaches used in a UK HEI, and additionally the numbers of contact hours student can expect at PGT level. Masterman and Shuyska (2012) found the opportunity to investigate academic topics in depth was most usually well received by PGT students. PGT programmes are designed in the main to offer in-depth study of advanced topics or areas of specialisation (Kember et al., 2014). However, working on topics in depth can be challenging over a

relatively short period of time, and particularly when students are undertaking a conversion course, from their undergraduate subject to another (QAA 2013). Particular issues have been identified for international students, for whom studying in depth through critical appraisal, can require them to take on what Melles (2009) felt required a major cultural change in their approach to learning.

2.5.5 Issues with self-directed and autonomous learning

O'Donnell et al. (2009) outlined that not all students followed a traditional route from undergraduate straight into postgraduate study, and that for some it was necessary to re-learn the basics of academic practice all over again. This confirms that a PGT student cohort can be very heterogeneous (O'Donnell et al, 2013). Many non-European, international students are not used to student-centred, self-directed learning approaches, where students are expected to become more autonomous, independent learners rather than the lecturer being central to their learning (Kingston and Forland, 2008; Watkins and Biggs, 2001).

According to Masterman and Shuyska (2012), some students enjoy a greater sense of self directedness, but others do have problems in making the adjustment to the demands of this style of learning, and the removal of the more supportive structures experienced at undergraduate level (Masterman and Shuyska 2012). Bamber et al (2017) suggest that the use of autonomous or self-directed learning means that students are expected to outline and organise what they need to learn and how, and to be able to work effectively with others. At PGT level, the expectation is to engage students in co-creation of learning, in order that they can bring their own experiences to the class (Bamber et al., 2017).

However, in Tobbell et al.'s (2010) study, it was found that many PGT students found the emphasis on independence to be a rather "*hostile*" approach. Students appeared more satisfied when engaging in interactive discussions with their peers, as some saw the importance placed on independent study simply as a lack of tutor support (Tobbell et al., 2010).

2.5.6 Learner backgrounds

Coates and Dickinson (2012) argue that HEIs should try harder to understand their students' learning backgrounds in order that they can develop learning and teaching strategies to facilitate both home and international students to realise their potential. This is particularly important for PGT students who, unlike undergraduates on three to four-year programmes, do not have much time for acculturation (Coates and Dickinson, 2012). Heussi (2013) suggests that international PGT students need a more detailed introduction to their programmes and early support and intervention provided on the actual academic teaching and learning approaches used. Greater understanding in this area is

desirable, and the transition experience of international students in particular has to be considered (Heussi, 2013).

Coneyworth et al (2019) reported that over 80% of both home-based and international students participating in their UK based survey, did not really understand what was expected from them as new PGT students. As Heussi (2013) stated, PGT students need to be clearly informed about what is expected of them in terms of the programme content and the type of learning approaches to be used. They need to be able to adjust and "*learn the ropes*" in order to make a successful transition to PGT study (Anderson et al., 2011). As Tobbell, O'Donnell, and Zammit (2010) commented,

> *'the practice of independence is encouraged by an absence of information rather than an active facilitation of helpful practices'* (p. 274).

According to Bamber et al. (2019) HEIs therefore have an important task in finding more appropriate ways in which to adapt their learning and teaching methods better to support students' engagement from the very start of their PGT programmes.

One aspect that might provide additional support is the now widespread institutional adoption of virtual learning environments (VLEs) (Browne et al., 2006). Garrison and Kanuka (2004) suggested that there are significant advantages for students in their use, particularly as a complement to the more traditional didactic methods of teaching, using technology enhanced blended learning approaches (Littlejohn and Pegler, 2007). The use of online materials and collaborative learning experiences can be very helpful for international students in particular, in terms of reflecting upon and reviewing material. According to Hounsell et al. (2005) making an 'organised effort', is important in establishing how students organise and use their study time effectively, and vital in helping students to achieve deeper level learning (Hounsell et al., 2005). Well-structured e-learning provision, consistent across the programme and student journey, can make an important contribution to learning and teaching approaches (Hounsell et al., 2005). This has been well demonstrated in universities' response to the recent pandemic.

2.5.7 Skills and knowledge development in PGT programmes

The need to develop and enhance skills relevant to PGT student's career progression and future employment is essential (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2010). It would seem that different challenges may be apparent for PGT students, as many have some work-related skills, but they are often lacking in specific discipline-related skills. The online environment could also be utilised to engage students and ensure their skills are developed and enhanced (Jancey and Burns, 2013).

There is evidence to suggest that those students entering university at the UG level with a low skill base can experience increased transition difficulties (Richardson, 2003) and so their expectations can be influenced by their previous experience (Bamber and Tett, 2000). Morgan (2014) suggests that it is possible that the same issues are likely to be repeated at the PGT level. Therefore, the need to find the weak areas in a student's skill base is important and the provision of additional support, when required, would be highly beneficial.

2.5.8 Future employability

According to Morgan and Direito (2016), in their UK-based study into PGT students' expectations and attitudes, experiences and post-study outcomes, respondents were asked if they thought employers valued a PGT qualification over an undergraduate degree they strongly agreed that this would be the case. Students also felt that the qualification would help them to enhance their skills and knowledge base. They felt that they would be able to offer a higher-level skill set which employers would appreciate in graduate applicants for employment (Morgan, 2014).

2.5.9 Differentiation

It would appear that increasing numbers of undergraduate students have been deciding to remain at university and take a PGT programme, in an effort to differentiate themselves in the highly competitive graduate jobs market and improve their employment prospects (Crouch and Goulding, 2013, Morgan, 2014).

2.5.10 Assessment

Tobbell et al. (2010) reported that some HEI assessment practices were rather inflexible and seemed not to be designed with the students' needs in mind. For many PGT students, time availability and time management issues can present difficulties due to the external demands placed on some of them by their partners, family and work commitments. Typically, assessment deadlines are communicated to students at the start of modules by staff who then expect students to meet them (Tobbell et al., 2010). In West's (2012) study, students expressed the need for their assessment deadlines to be 'more spaced out'. Their assessment work was supposed to reflect several months of work via the use of journals, formative assessments and the application of theory gained throughout the year. However, it was found that most assignment work was not completed as the tutors expected and was all finished a fortnight prior to the deadline (West, 2012). This finding supports Tobbell et al.'s (2010) opinion that that the expectation of staff for students to be able to organise their time effectively in order to meet multiple hand-in dates can be somewhat problematic, as students cannot necessarily comply with these requirements.

2.5.11 Group work issues

The expectation for students to work together in mixed cultural teams as part of their PGT programme is well recognised in the field of business and management education. This approach is well accepted and based on sound educational practice, as it prepares students for their future business-related careers (Gabriel and Griffiths, 2008). However, many overseas students often find it hard to participate in group debates and team-based exercises (Holmes, 2005; Parks and Raymond, 2004; Ramsey and Mason, 2004). Unfortunately, if students find that working in teams is a negative experience, then this could possibly have a damaging halo effect over their PGT experience overall (Gabriel and Griffiths, 2008).

2.5.12 Feedback

In a recent case study undertaken by Tsai (2020) on PGT feedback, it was found that there were some important issues that concerned students regarding feedback and assessment practice. The first concern was about a possible lack of consistency in both marking and feedback practice. It seems that this issue not only exists in the differences between marking by different lecturers and tutors, but also the in the gap between students' own evaluation of the quality of their work and the assessment by their tutors. The second concern was about the perceived usefulness of the feedback, which was judged on how detailed, comprehensive, and timely the feedback they received was (Tsai, 2020).

According to Tsai (2020) learners consider feedback at three levels, which includes affective (which means they are seeking assurance, developing trust, and cultivating confidence), cognitive (which is understanding feedback and selecting actionable information) and behavioural (which includes following or ignoring advice, adjusting learning strategy or seeking support). Dunworth and Sanchez (2016) suggest that affective engagement with feedback supports the students' motivation, self-esteem, and a continuous dialogue, whilst the cognitive element directs students to their desired goals and expectations, providing them with a measure of their own performance in comparison to those of their peers and to programme standards. The cognitive element points to the need for reflection and a sense of autonomy (Dunworth and Sanchez, 2016).

Tsai (2020) also recommends that the use of peer assessment and feedback may prove beneficial in addressing the inconsistency issues between students' self-evaluations and the tutor's evaluations. Peer feedback engages students in academic conversations that can support the establishment of a

learning community and sense of belonging (Man et al., 2018) and can help to reduce anxiety amongst students (Dickson et al., 2019).

2.6 Moving through phase (Strategies) - Relationship building

In this second section of 'moving through' transition, the concept of relationship building will be briefly explored to include the importance of learning communities, networking and social events, culture and language. These aspects provide support to the transitioning PGT students through the development of coping strategies to deal with, control, avoid, or prevent stressful situations (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

The literature reviewed relating to the relationship elements of transition included: **Socialisation processes** (Perry and Allard, 2003; Johnson and Watson, 2004; Tobbell et al., 2010; Wood and Waite, 2011; Falloon, 2011; Briggs at al. 2012; Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013; Menzies and Baron, 2014; Matheson and Sutcliffe, 2018), **learning community of practice** (Wenger, 1998; Margolis, 2005; O'Neil et al., 2007; Cowan, 2015; Matheson and Sutcliffe, 2018), **networking and social events** (House, 1981; Shapiro and Levine, 1999; Lacina, 2002; Menzies and Baron, 2014) and **culture and language** (Byrne and Flood, 2005; Liu, 2009; Edwards and Li, 2011; Egege and Kutieleh, 2013, Wu, 2014).

2.6.1 Socialisation processes

In a study by Menzies and Baron (2014), it was reported that socialisation was an important element in supporting students' transition into a postgraduate environment. It is suggested that the socialisation process should ideally start even before students arrive on campus. Students' period of adjustment includes making connections pre-university and throughout their experience whilst at university (Perry and Allard, 2003). The process can begin even before students make the transfer by visiting the HEI and through contact with current students and staff (Johnson and Watson, 2004). This helps them to find out what being a PGT student would be like (Briggs at al. 2012).

As Wood and Waite (2011) explain, that amongst students *'there is a need to belong'.* However, as Matheson and Sutcliffe (2018) explain, the provision of a basic understanding of what belonging is or could be, is rather difficult to express eloquently. It seems important to this study, however, to register that student identity, engagement and motivation is clearly related to the extent to which they feel they belong (Falloon, 2011). As noted earlier, there is currently only limited research on PGT transition, and in particular, on the necessity to generate students' feelings of belonging (Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013). As Tobbell et al. (2010) explain,

'A knowledge and understanding of the practices and issues that shape participation becomes key in identifying pedagogic strategy' (p.10).

2.6.1 Learning community of practice

Key to the study on belonging undertaken by Matheson and Sutcliffe (2018) with students transitioning into PGT study, was the requirement to establish communities of practice. Wenger (1998) defines a community of practice (CoP) as a group of people who have been brought together by place, purpose, events, needs and values. This process is one that seems to be central to the creation of a feeling of 'belonging' (Matheson and Sutcliffe, 2018). In order to facilitate a CoP, there is a need to recognise similarities rather than differences, creating a sense of shared values. Supporting transition of PGT students from diverse backgrounds and cultures into a CoP can perhaps, be problematic. However, as Matheson and Sutcliffe (2018) found from their study, those students who became actively and socially involved with their cohort, found the transition process to be more straight forward, as they develop self confidence in their communication skills and their ability to join in.

Matheson and Sutcliffe (2018) were able to set up a CoP, as reported in their study, by developing a set of experiential activities for PGT transitioning students. The intention was to allow students to share and value their experiences, explore their diverse cultural backgrounds, and give them the time and space to consider their past experiences (in terms of education, values and family), influencing their hopes, concerns and expectations. It seemed that a key aspect in developing this sense of 'belonging' was the importance of establishing a learning environment that supported openness and trust (Matheson and Sutcliffe, 2018).

Margolis (2005) suggested there are a number of ways to increase the self-efficacy of students. This includes praising and rewarding their hard work, persistence and achievement, tutor provision of regular and timely feedback and circumventing a focus on aptitudes and skills that students believe are not possible. Matheson and Sutcliffe (2018) agree that this is true for both international and home students making the transition to PGT study, whilst they are trying to hone the skills they need for study at master's level. Cowan's (2015) study also reported that the provision of timely, detailed and useful feedback and feedforward on student performance, found that self-efficacy became improved, and was important in supporting students' transition, resulting overall in positive outcomes. In a study conducted by O'Neil et al. (2007), the findings highlight students' perceived benefit from the support offered by their fellow students.

2.6.3 Networking and social events

Menzies and Baron's (2014) study of students transitioning to PGT programmes in Australia, found that social networks developed through student societies were able to facilitate student transition more easily than universities themselves in providing support. Networks can be useful in the provision of activities and social events for students to enable students to meet each other and develop friendships (Lacina, 2002). Friends can be very important support systems for students and may often replace counselling or other support systems (Menzies and Baron, 2014). For international students in particular, past research (Shapiro and Levine, 1999) linked their success to involvement in social activities and peer interactions. Being a part of such groups and activities helps international students to mix, learn from and exchange ideas with one another, which helps them with the process of adaptation (Menzies and Baron, 2014).

House (1981) considered the importance of social support as it is linked to networking. It can provide a 'protective' factor against a sense of helplessness and its consequential effects on stress and ill health. Social support can be classified into four types, according to House (1981). Firstly, emotional support is connected to the provision of a caring approach and building a feeling of trust. Secondly, instrumental support comprises providing tangible help to directly help those in need by friends and peers. Thirdly, informational support includes providing advice and information. Finally, appraisal support includes information for evaluation such as feed forward and feedback (House, 1981).

In Menzies and Baron's (2014) study, the PGT students reported that their experience of transition had gone well because they had made friends, and this had enabled them to adjust and settle into university life. Their social transition helped the students with their academic transition, as they could ask their friends if they needed advice and support with regard to university conventions (Menzies and Baron, 2014). The social support they reported receiving included emotional and appraisal support, also instrumental and informational support (Menzies and Baron, 2014). These were the four types of social support important for transition and learning as identified by House (1981). As Menzies and Baron (2014) suggest, it is important to build positive interactive experiences for students, allowing them to network through social events and societies to enable them to build friendships and aid them through transition.

2.6.4 Culture and language

According to Wu (2014) the development of academic capital is not the only form of capital that drives overseas students, and Chinese students in particular, to study abroad. The importance of developing fluency in English can be linked to their desire to network with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, which can be seen to be important for their personal, social and career

development back in their home country (Edwards and Li, 2011). As Wu (2014) highlights, HEIs should support greater opportunities for students to develop their wider cultural capital through creating contacts with other students from diverse backgrounds.

According to Egege and Kutieleh (2003), the transition to UK based learning practices for PGT students from overseas countries including China, can be very difficult to manage, since transitions of knowledge from other regions of the world can differ substantially from those conventions of western countries. Lui (2009) found that overseas students were better able to cope with tutor-centred learning approaches than with student-centred learning, with many finding it difficult to adapt to the UK HEI preferences for such learning and teaching approaches (Liu, 2009). Byrne and Flood (2005) suggested that overseas students needed to adapt to those learning and teaching pedagogies preferred by UK HEIs in addition to the wider cultural environment. They felt that any differences between overseas students' expectations and their actual perceptions would only serve to increase those students' difficulties with their transition (Byrne and Flood, 2005).

As Liu (2010) suggests, UK HEIs need to understand that the needs of their international students are different, not just from those of undergraduate students, but also from UK domiciled counterparts. HEIs need to ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms in place to support their overseas students through their transition to PGT study (Liu, 2010). Such support, Lui (2010) explains, could be addressed at the programme level especially during induction, when students' knowledge of UK learning, teaching and assessment approaches could be ascertained, and clarification provided to why these methods are used and how they can be advanced successfully during the PGT programme (Lui, 2010).

2.7 Moving through phase (Self) – Identity and personal changes

In this section of the 'moving through' phase aspects relating to changes to students' identities as they transition to PGT study will be outlined. The section examines the notion of 'self', relating to who the student is, their identity, personal and psychological characteristics (Schlossberg et al. 1995). The following factors relating to this phase include student identity changes, identity salience, enhancing self-worth and self-esteem and shaping personal and professional identity.

The academic literature identified relating to the 'self' aspect of transition includes: **student identity changes** (Gallacher et al., 2002; Huon and Sankey, 2002; Tranter, 2003; Johnson and Watson, 2004; Kember and Leung, 2005; Scanlon et al., 2005; Adams et al., 2006; Good and Adams, 2008; Christie et al., 2008; Briggs et al., 2012; Lairio et al., 2013), **identity salience** (Arnett et al., 2003; Tajfel and Turner, 1986) **enhancing self-worth and self-esteem** (Hogg et al., 1995; Stryker, 1968, 1980, 1987;

Callero, 1985; Thoits, 1991), **shaping personal and professional identity** (Gallacher et al., 2002; Arnett et al, 2003; Archer, 2008; Lairio et al., 2013).

2.7.1 Student identity changes

According to Adams et al. (2006), when students undertake the transition to university studies, the changes they are required to make can lead to students re-evaluating their own identity and ways of doing things. Lairio et al. (2013) explain that identity refers to an individual's perception of themselves as a person and in the way in which they see themselves in relation to others. According to Briggs et al. (2012), support is needed to help students develop their learner identity and autonomy,

> "*on both sides of the transition bridge*" (p.6).

The adjustment students need to make to help them think about themselves as learners and social beings is enhanced when they have the opportunity to form positive social relationships with both other students and university staff (Johnson and Watson, 2004). It is crucial that students quickly form a sense of their student identity (Huon and Sankey, 2002) or they could become disoriented and experience a loss of personal identity (Scanlon et al., 2005). If this happens then it might be possible that students abandon their studies altogether (Tranter, 2003).

According to Kember and Leung (2005), the HE environment is comprised of at least three elements that are connected to students' identity construction and salience. The first is the extent to which informal and personal interaction with staff is encouraged, the second is interaction with peers, and the third is the curriculum. Students' positive identities are supported and enhanced when their tutors develop a relationship with them, by showing an interest in them as individuals, and by paying attention to their wellbeing (Gallacher et al., 2002). In this way, a supportive learning environment, together with academic achievement helps to provide positive identity construction for students (Good and Adams, 2008). It is important that HEIs offer an environment where students have good interaction with the staff, where they can build a sense that they are part of a learning community and that they are made aware of the university's practices (Christie et al., 2008).

2.7.2 Identity salience

The allied concept of 'identity salience' is grounded in that of identity theory (Arnett et al., 2003). Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) can be used to explore and investigate ways in which student expectations of their role are developed and how their social and personal identities as students entering PGT study, are derived. SIT assumes that people have different levels of identification and self-categorization, and that there is a need to distinguish between behaviour

motivated by individuals acting as individuals (personal identity), and behaviour that is guided by a shared identity, in this case as PGT students with others (social identity). Group behaviour can be understood by considering how members of a group perceive their relationship within their own group and how their own group then perceives other groups. It is the sense of self that individuals derive from membership of social groups that makes up their *social identity*. Building on the assumption that individuals can define their sense of self in social identity ('we'), or in personal identity terms ('I'), it is argued that context determines which level of identity is most salient at a particular moment in time. Identities can be arranged hierarchically, and the most salient identities are more likely to affect student attitudes and behaviour than less important ones (Arnett et al., 2003). It is important. Therefore, that HEIs seek to build relationships that nurture and support salient student identities.

2.7.3 Enhancing self-worth and self-esteem

Identity theory is focused upon the connections between the self, personalised roles, society and role performance. It is a theory that considers identity related behaviours (Hogg et al.,1995). Stryker and Burke (2000) explain that it can provide reasons as to why people may purchase certain products and/or use certain services for example. According to Stryker (1987) the self is a structure made up of multiple identities and that people occupy positions and play out roles dependent upon a variety of contexts. Those identities which are more salient provide more meaning for the self and are, therefore, likely to provoke particular identity related behaviours (Stryker and Burke, 2000). The successful use of these identity-related behaviours can validate a person's status as a member of an identity group (Callero, 1985), (for example, as a part of a group of postgraduate students), and a person's perception that they are adopting behaviours consistent with this identity can enhance their self-worth and increase their self-esteem. However, the reverse is also true, poor performance can lead to poor self-worth and low esteem (Thoits, 1991). It can be seen, therefore, that persons with a strong salience for a particular identity will attempt successfully to adopt the behaviours associated with that identity.

2.7.4 Shaping personal and professional identity

The academic and professional identity of students develops in the personal choices that they make during their transition to university (Lairio et al., 2013). Their fellow students, tutors and social role models are important as "shapers" of that identity (Gallacher et al., 2002). According to Archer (2008),

> "*living in an increasingly performance-oriented world as well as a sense of increased insecurity about HE has made it harder to create a solid and stable academic identity*" (p.338).

It seems that HEIs can have a significant impact in terms of shaping their PGT students' academic and professional identities by encouraging them to adopt the more salient identities that lead to successful attitudes and behaviours. This can be achieved through building closer relationships to support students as individuals and helping them to develop stronger learning communities as they make the transition into PGT through to successful completion of their studies (Arnett et al.,2003).

2.8 Moving through phase (Support) – Learner support and facilities

In this final 'moving through' phase of the 4 S framework, the sources of support available to PGT students in transition will be considered (Schlossberg et al., 1995). This section considers the importance of programme level support and the facilities made available to PGT students.

The key aspects in the transition literature that relate to this phase are **programme organisation and support** (Smith, 2006; Tobbell et al., 2010; Coates and Dickenson, 2012; West, 2012; Heussi, 2013; Bamber et al, 2017; Coneyworth et al., 2019) and **PGT learning environment, facilities and social spaces** (Sapri et al., 2009; Litten and Hall, 1989, Hesketh and Knight, 1999; Neves and Leman, 2019; Humphrey and McCarthy, 1999).

2.8.1 Programme organisation and support

In their study into PGT choices, Hesketh and Knight (1999) found that students thought that well organised and well-structured programmes were an indication of good quality in PGT provision, despite it not being particularly easy to define what a well-structured programme was. However, there were some key elements such as: information about the programme structure, assessment information and criteria, which were seen as a sign of a commitment to quality. Some elements of choice between modules was seen as important, as students tended to voice concerns when there was limited module choice, or when issues raised had not been addressed (Hesketh and Knight, 1999). In addition, Hesketh and Knight (1999) found that, where students believed there had been poor organisation and administration, this would reflect negatively on their programme outcomes and in the attitudes of staff towards them. Students agreed that high-quality programmes are administered well and are properly organised with a good flow of information, so that students were made aware of any programme changes in plenty of time (Hesketh and Knight 1999).

According to Huessi (2013), PGT students often struggle with the content of their programmes in terms of the academic requirements. Tobbell et al. (2010) support the idea that PGT students have to cope with challenging environments in their bid to succeed in postgraduate study. They posit that PGT students believe that they do not receive enough support. Coneyworth et al. (2019) found that, in comparison to undergraduate students, PGT students have access to less resource in order to help

familiarise them with the university's culture and its approaches to learning and teaching. Clearly an assumption seems to have been made, that due to their prior educational success at undergraduate level, they are 'expert students' but this is in clear opposition to the students' feelings of confusion and struggle (Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013).

According to Smith (2006), many PGT students are now bearing in mind not only the academic reputation of HEIs but are also considering the level of support they can access when deciding where to study. Coneyworth et al. (2019) explain that there is a clearly growing need for HEIs to consider the needs of their diverse cohorts of PGT students and understand how their expectations motivations and adaptation can affect their learning experiences and ultimately successful transition through PGT studies.

As Coates and Dickenson (2012) explain, the needs of international PGT students and their prior learning experiences can cover a broad range. Their needs and expectations, alongside the fact that English is often their second language, requires a tailored programme of support to be put in place. The programme should meet the needs of all PGT students to engage successfully with their learning (Coates and Dickenson, 2012). Coates and Dickenson (2012) suggest that any induction programmes or any learning support programmes must be designed with particular student cohorts in mind. Induction programmes help students to comprehend ways in which to manage their studies and effectively engage with their programmes. Coates and Dickenson (2012) recommend that effective learning support needs to be fully integrated into modules embedded in the programme structure. In the study conducted by West (2012) it was reported that PGT students tended to prefer subject specific support to be delivered by their module tutors. West (2012) found that PGT students tended to dislike some support services on offer, as they were perceived as remedial, and that workshops should only be offered according to student recommendations and needs or exist only when students received them integrated into their programmes.

Coneyworth et al. (2019) reported in their study, that students were provided with a tailored PGT programme of support, where they were given the opportunity to identify their own skills, requirements, and an understanding of their 'preparedness for master's level studies (Bamber et al., 2017). The support programme became a forum within which these important considerations could take place, where students' anxieties could be reduced, and the development of autonomy could be nurtured (Coneyworth et al., 2019).

2.8.2 PGT learning environment, facilities and social spaces

Sapri et al. (2009) consider that in order for HEIs to offer their core mission in relation to research and teaching activities, it is necessary for them to have a considerable physical infrastructure. This

includes widespread estate and buildings for specific purposes such as, lectures theatres, staff offices, residential accommodation, catering facilities, gyms, sports pitches and other recreational facilities. According to Sapri et al. (2009), important aspects that may impact students' level of satisfaction for HEI services were those aspects relating to facilities management. For example, facilities such the library and the overall campus environment were deemed very important. To an extent, this echoes the findings of Litten and Hall in their 1989 study, which reported that students consider that dimensions of HEI quality include the programme of study, teaching, equipment and library facilities (Litten and Hall, 1989).

Hesketh and Knight (1999) suggest that it is reasonable to believe that PGT students consider the facilities available to them at university, because insufficient facilities can affect the quality of their work and hence the overall quality of the programme. Rooms for PGT students, which include dedicated information technology facilities, were considered by students to be important quality aspects (Hesketh and Knight, 1999).

In the recent PTES report (Neves and Leman, 2019) it was identified that HEIs scored highly in their provision of what were seen to be effective resources to PGT students. For example, the library, IT resources, subject-specific resources and information were all rated very highly. However, the key areas that were rated least positively were those of programme organisation, including guidance and communication. (Neves and Leman, 2019)

According to the study undertaken by Humphrey and McCarthy (1999), postgraduate students believed that their needs were different to those of undergraduate students, and they considered themselves overall, to be dissimilar to undergraduate students. There was considerable evidence in their study, that PGT students felt some antipathy towards undergraduate students if they had to integrate with them (Humphrey and McCarthy, 1999). It was reported that PGT students "*wanted separate facilities and increased opportunities to meet with other postgraduates*" (Humphrey and McCarthy, 1999, p.13). Some of the comments in Humphrey and McCarthy's (1999) study discussed the need for separate PGT academic facilities with some postgraduates even complaining about to having to live near undergraduate students. This led to the suggestion that HEIs should consider developing specific facilities for their postgraduate cohorts and that the policy of integrating postgraduate with undergraduate students, adopted by many HEIs, is likely to be an inappropriate one (Humphrey and McCarthy, 1999).

2.9 Moving out phase (Post transition) - Post university services

In this section, the final post transition phase, according to Schlossberg et al. (1995), will be considered. This 'moving out' phase or 'taking charge' process will culminate in the student

successfully completing this transition before moving onto another new phase (Schlossberg et al., 1995). For PGT students there are some key elements that will facilitate the ending of the transition process: post-graduation and the subsequent move onto the next phase of their life. In this phase the following elements were identified in the literature: **Alumni services** (Artess et al. (2014), **post PGT careers support and employment services** (Harvey, 2000; Tomlinson, 2012; Artess et al., 2014, Holmes, 2013; Bowman, 2005; Clarke, 2017; CIHE, 2010) and **post PGT experience and activities** (Sung and Yang, 2009; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001; Koenig-Lewis et al., 2016).

2.9.1 Alumni services

According to Artess et al. (2014) HEIs need to optimise use of their alumni as invited speakers, role models and mentors to widen the horizons of their PGT students and facilitate future possibilities. There should be informal networks developed between employers, academic staff, alumni and PGT students to support them with the transition into the world of work (Artess et al., 2014).

2.9.2 Post PGT careers support and employment services

According to Harvey (2000) businesses require graduates not only to demonstrate their technical knowledge and competencies of their discipline, but also a range of work relevant skills and competencies. From an employer perspective, skilled postgraduates are important because they play a key role for business in '*enhancing value-added products and services*' (Tomlinson, 2012. p.25) also assisting with frequent technological developments and success (Tomlinson, 2012).

Artess et al (2014) stated that in order fully to realise the benefits of postgraduate study, it is important that postgraduates are developed to be employable and are confident in being able to market their talents to employers but also that employers recognise the benefits that employing postgraduates can bring. Holmes (2013) considered the process that students take in transitioning from university into employment. As students develop the skills and attributes needed to gain a degree, they need to develop their graduate identity which they can present to their future organisational recruiters or 'gatekeepers' (Holmes, 2013). They have to display those 'graduate' characteristics that will distinguish them from non-graduates and any other graduates in the market, by offering a future employer the type of skills and attributes they will expect.

According to Bowman (2005) there are generally fewer resources made available to PGT students for careers guidance as a particular, separate student group. It appears that HE careers services and providers see their support work as needing to concentrate on undergraduate and PhD students. The lack of PGT careers support reflects this and not enough research has been done to discover whether PGT students have particular career guidance needs and the extent to which their needs differ from

the needs of undergraduate students (Bowman, 2005). In addition, graduating PGT students' concerns about their employability persist, since student fees have increased to higher levels compared with a few years ago, there is greater labour market unpredictability, and more recently, increased job insecurity, which has somewhat destabilised their confidence in terms of career prospects (Clarke, 2017). However, the CIHE report (2010) found that seven out of ten recruiters sought out master's graduates specifically for their analytical, thinking and problem-solving skills. Artess at el. (2014) found that in cases where employers actively sought to recruit graduates with a relevant master's degree, the added skill set that can be offered by postgraduate students was well recognised. Master's students were believed to have greater maturity, alongside stronger learning and analytical skills.

Artess et al. (2014) suggest that HEIs should work closely with employers to develop particular subject centred PGT programmes which will be of value to various industries, sectors or professions and targeted at certain student groups. In addition, they should identify the importance of relationship management and the time and expertise required to build effective working partnerships with employers, developing events and activities that they can engage in. Finally, Artess et al. (2014) suggest that HEIs should consider positioning their master's programmes as entry into specific professions, allowing students without a related first degree to convert into the subject area.

2.9.3 Post PGT experience and activities

There is a general consensus in the literature on the HE student experience that not only student retention is influenced by students' experience of their programme, but also any feelings of allegiance or loyalty towards the HEI post-graduation (Sung and Yang, 2009). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) posit that student loyalty can be conceptualised as an attitude which is most usually demonstrated as alumni recommending their university to other prospective students.

However, according to Lui and Jia (2008), the students' experience influences their ongoing perceptions and feelings towards the HEI but once they graduate, any ongoing interactions can increase the strength of any links they have with the HEI (Farrow and Yuan, 2011). For this reason, Sung and Yang (2009) suggest that it is important for HEIs to develop relationship-cultivating strategies to encourage not only student participation but that of alumni too. Students' inclinations to continue to support their institution is contingent on their satisfaction with their experience; to include relationships built, the HEI's reputation, ongoing communication and their perceptions of quality with their experience. As Sung and Yang (2009) further explain, it is important that HEIs support active communication with current and past student cohorts. As constructive relationships

and ongoing communications support and maintain a good reputation for the HEI, it also helps to motivate alumni's future supportive behaviour (Sung and Yang, 2009).

Koenig-Lewis et al. (2016) investigated the links between alumni recollections of their experiences as students and their ensuing loyalty attitudes and behaviours towards their UK based HEIs. Their study was able to identify a variety of distinct alumni clusters or segments with similar characteristics. As Koenig-Lewis et al. (2016) explained, this has important consequences for HE managers, as to date, HE alumni associations have been inclined to assume a mass relationship marketing approach which has often led to poor alumni engagement and considered therefore to be a missed opportunity. Koenig-Lewis et al. (2016) suggested that alumni relations offices should offer a more segmented and targeted approach with their alumni groups. Koenig-Lewis et al. (2016) suggest this could be a useful direction for

> '*further studies in the field of relationship marketing in higher education*' (p.76).

2.10 Adapted conceptual framework for PGT transition

The following conceptual framework is presented below based on Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) model of transition and the academic literature reviewed in this chapter pertaining to PGT transition stages and the student experience.

Figure 2.4. An adapted framework for PGT transition. (Adapted from Schlossberg et al. (1995).
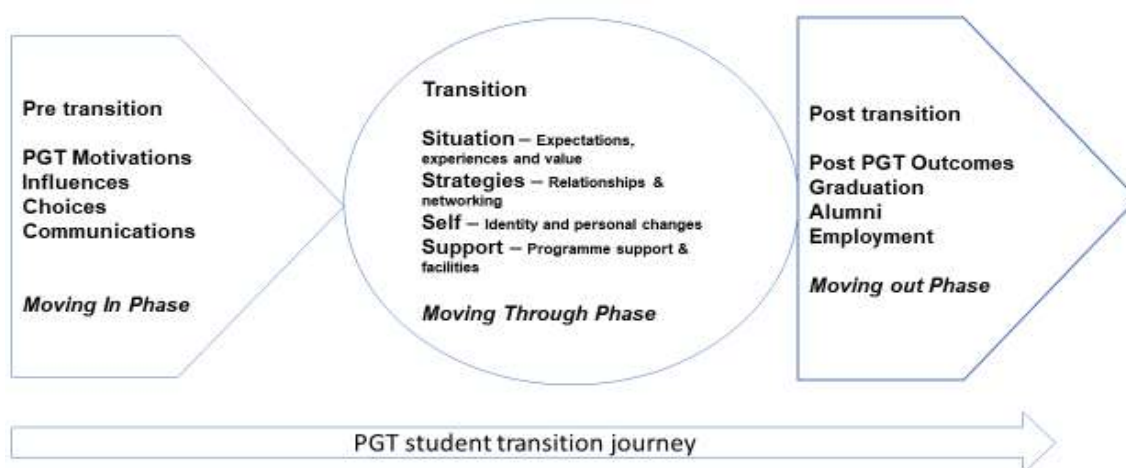
2.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter highlighted the importance of PGT students to the UK HE sector and explored the reasons why and how a growing number of PGT students decide to undertake PGT studies. The

chapter outlined the motivations for their decisions, the influences on the choices that they make and their expectations of the process of transitioning into PGT study through to successful outcomes.

Whilst the academic literature remains somewhat sparse in the area of PGT transition, this study has sought to contribute to the literature through the application of Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) theory of transition. To date, no previous studies have applied this theory to explore the issues related to PGT student transition.

Whilst Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) theory has been used to identify the key phases of the transition process for PGT students, the transition model and theory was not developed specifically for this purpose. It therefore has some limited application to the context and required some adaption and therefore an adapted conceptual model was developed to combine the theory with the PGT transition literature. There remain elements of the PGT transition process that require a more in-depth, tailored analysis. For example, the importance and impact of university reputation and prestige to those prospective PGT students, who may be considering making the transition. These students may be influenced by the valuable, ongoing support of loyal alumni (past students) and their credible word of mouth (WOM) endorsements on behalf of the HEI. These factors and others require some further exploration. The requirement for HEIs to build close and supportive relationships by both staff and students' peer groups needs a more detailed analysis. The quality of the PGT student experience which includes UK teaching, co-creation of learning, identity formation and the support functions offered by their university, will impact on the PGT student experience, their satisfaction and ongoing future relationship with the HEI, post-graduation. These elements will be further explored in the next chapter to consider the application of relationship marketing (RM) principles to the transition process to support student satisfaction and ongoing supportive relationships with the HEI in their transition journey.

In the next chapter, an amalgamated conceptual framework will be developed and presented based on the adapted transition model to include the identified RM factors. The conceptual framework will underpin the three qualitative research studies to be undertaken in this thesis in order to meet the research objectives. The framework developed for PGT transition will amalgamate the adapted Schlossberg et al. (1995) model (see Figure 2.3) presented above, together with a model of RM Outcomes developed by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2002). RM has not been used in the context of student transition before. It is hoped, therefore, that this study will make an original contribution to the existing academic literature. From a practical perspective, it is also hoped that this study will offer guidance to HEIs in supporting their PGT students, through the transition process using RM principles, towards successful outcomes in their chosen careers and as active, loyal alumni.

Chapter 3. Literature Review – Relationship Marketing

3.0 Introduction

In the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, the importance of PGT students to the UK HE sector was highlighted and the reasons why and how a growing number of PGT students decide to undertake PGT studies were explored.

Since not only the acquisition, but the retention of PGT students, has become so important for HEIs, it is proposed that the strategies and approaches from the RM paradigm should be of great interest to HEI considering the transition of PGT students from enrolment, retention, to overall student and alumni experiences.

This chapter will explore the application of marketing principles from the perspective of HE as a service and how that service has become increasing marketised over the past three decades before moving onto considering how RM principles developed and how they can be applied to the transition experience of students. Following a detailed review of the RM literature and applicability of various RM models, the chapter will conclude with the development of research questions and a conceptual model of transition which incorporates RM principles.

3.1 Higher Education as a service

It has been recognised for some years that HE is a service (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2015). Services are intangible and rather than being physical objects, they have been described as activities, actions or performances by Berry (1980) and as events or processes by Grönroos (2017). As Parasuraman et al. (1986) explained, there has been some consensus in the literature about the features which differentiate services provision from that of goods. These features include intangibility, perishability, inseparability of production and consumption, and heterogeneity (Parasuraman et al., 1986). These key features mean services cannot be inspected, handled or owned which can lead to difficulties for customers when trying to evaluate an intangible service offering (Solomon et al., 2019). As the service is inseparable from the source of the service, production and consumption take place simultaneously. Services are perishable since they cannot be stored which means that if yesterday's programme vacancy is filled, it can no longer be taken up. Heterogeneity

means that services are difficult to standardize which means it is difficult to control quality. Services differ considerably in the extent to which they are people-based or equipment-based. Educational programmes (other than online programmes offered through distance learning) are mostly heavily people-based, with the staff providing the service part of the product (Nicholls et al., 1995). As Grönroos (2017) explains, services are processes made up of a mix of actions and interactions by service providers and customers, where tangible and physical resources and systems, including people, shape the service through their interactions.

Due to their nature, service providers can find it problematic to try to differentiate their provision from that of competitors and it is equally difficult for consumers to be able to measure the quality of the service, as it is often difficult to perceive this before the service is acquired and consumed (Purgailis and Zaska, 2012). It would seem, according to Rutter et al. (2017), that HEIs in particular find it problematic to differentiate themselves and in fact have to highlight their similarities with competitors in order to demonstrate they can meet expected educational standards. This situation offers a potential challenge for HEI differentiation (Winter and Thompson-Whiteside, 2017).

Research into service quality within the higher education sector has significantly increased over the past two decades. As competition in the education sector becomes more intense, many providers have focused upon developing a '*customer orientation'* by providing excellent service quality (Wright, 2000). As Ng and Forbes (2009) explain, marketing should not necessarily be about advertising or intense selling because in the domain of services marketing, which is where HEIs should be positioned, the customer is placed at the centre and the focus is upon creating educational experiences that genuinely satisfy students' needs.

Concern about the quality of services that organisations provide is critical because of the key role service quality performs in providing competitive advantage and in appealing to new customers and retaining existing ones (Ugboma et al., 2007). Within the higher education context, provision of quality services is one of the most important priorities of HEIs globally (Trivellas and Geraki, 2008).

The perceived quality of the service can be defined as the service user's judgment about its excellence (Rowley, 1997). Sharif and Kassim (2012) explain that service quality is usually consumer driven, so it is difficult for service providers to appreciate and apply the concept of "service quality" in a uniform way. Service quality in HE is a key and essential aspect because it is clear that positive perceptions of service quality have a significant influence on student satisfaction (Alves and Raposo, 2010).

Overall, the services marketing literature has maintained that customer satisfaction will result in relationship development and greater customer loyalty (Senior et al., 2017; Ng and Forbes, 2009;

Grönroos, 2017; Parasuraman et al., 1986, 1988). Elliott and Shin (2002) argued that student satisfaction was linked to an improved learning experience. Other research has also demonstrated that student satisfaction leads to student loyalty and to long-term relationships being established between universities and their students and this particularly the case post-graduation (Voss and Page, 2020; Elliott and Shin, 2002; Bejou, 2005). The importance of links between services to relationship marketing was recognized early on, for example, in the Nordic school research tradition (Grönroos, 1989). Relationships are based on service, and service is relational. As Grönroos (2017) states,

> "*Customer relationships are not just there; they have to be earned. They are earned through service*. (p.219)

3.1.1 Services and relationship marketing

Service quality and related marketing concepts such as customer satisfaction and loyalty were rarely applied in the HE sector in the past (Chong and Ahmed, 2015). At best they were seen as informal elements that had some usefulness for HEIs but were not considered particularly important to their survival. However, in the past three decades there have been unparalleled changes in the HE landscape (Chong and Ahmed, 2015; Dennis et al., 2016). In response to these sector changes, universities have gradually had to adapt and use more business-like approaches, such as the application of strategic planning processes, mission and vision statements and key performance indicators that promote aspects such as accountability, efficiency and quality assurance (Lomas, 2007). Following a more market focussed approach in the HE sector, aspects such as students' quality perceptions and satisfaction have come to the fore in HEIs (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001). The marketing theories and concepts successfully applied in business organisations started to be applied by HEIs, mostly in an attempt to gain a competitive advantage. (Hemsley–Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Temple and Shattock, 2007).

The relationship marketing (RM) concept first appeared in the 1990s out of the services and industrial marketing literature. The services marketing literature explained that satisfied customers and other stakeholders could lead to relationship enhancement and loyalty (e.g., Grönroos, 1994; 2017; Parasuraman et al., 1991). As competition between HEIs has intensified, RM initiatives have increasingly been considered as providing the appropriate strategies to achieve an advantage in the market (Bowden, 2011). According to Agariya and Singh (2011), in their extensive literature review on the defining factors of relationship marketing, the six most often cited constructs included trust, satisfaction/experience, loyalty, commitment, service quality, and communication. These constructs were cited more than 50 times by different researchers in their work (Agariya and Singh, 2011).

The RM concept includes the management of all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing and maintaining successful relational exchanges (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) and what Berry (1995) described as being "the vanguard" of marketing and academic marketing research. RM was defined by Grönroos (1994) thus:

> "to establish, maintain, and enhance relationships with customers and other partners, at a profit, so that the objectives of the parties involved are met. This is achieved by mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises" (p.9).

These relationships are usually, but not always, considered to be long term. The establishment of a relationship with a customer can be divided into two parts: to attract the customer and to build the relationship with them so that the goals of that relationship are achieved (Grönroos, 1994).

RM approaches are often seen to be especially useful in contexts where there are high levels of social exchange and in non-profit marketing, such as in HE, according to Arnett et al. (2003). In an increasingly competitive environment, many organisations have embraced this concept in order to retain customers and other stakeholders in order to achieve a competitive advantage in the market (Arnett et al., 2003). RM, as de Macedo-Burgamo et al. (2012) explained, is crucial in order to create and maintain relationships between HEIs and their students because such relationships are seen as critical in supporting 'customer' retention and loyalty.

3.2 Marketisation of UK Higher Education

The UK HE sector has undergone many changes over the past three decades. In what has become an increasingly competitive global marketplace (Maringe and Foskett, 2012), there have been changes to government policy, massification, funding changes (Evans et al., 2021) and increased student expectations (Blackmore, 2009). These market pressures to meet increased demand and to be more accountable to various stakeholder groups have contributed to putting pressure on HEIs (Blackmore, 2009). It would seem that the marketisation of HE is growing worldwide, it is not simply a UK trend (Brown and Carasso, 2013). This is due to market steering replacing government steering and the replacement of state grants with tuition fees and student loans to pay for HE programmes. The importance of league tables and commercial rankings are growing and HEIs feel that they must devote ever increasing funds into their marketing and customer service budgets (Brown and Carasso, 2013). Due to the reality of increased marketisation, there has been a manifest change in HEIs, as previously autonomous academic organisations, to those now based around business principles. According to Brown and Carasso (2013) the benefit of,

> 'market-based policies have almost certainly made UK higher education much more efficient, entrepreneurial and responsive to external stakeholders' (p. 163).

According to Voss and Page (2020), marketisation is perhaps most prominent in the growth of business education due to its links to graduate employability and careers, and business schools, as part of HEIs, have seen the largest growth worldwide as student numbers have increased rapidly.

As Greenaway and Haynes (2003) explained, with large growth seen in the number of students attending HEIs and, considering the fees they contribute to relieve financial burden upon the state, this has led to the development of the "*student as customer*" concept. Back in 2005, Sir Howard Newby, the Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), felt that a greater business-orientated approach to HE was needed with students being treated as customers and HEIs should be "*much more client facing and focused*" (Newby, 2005).

The concept of the '*student as a customer*' according to Shim and Morgan (1990), was derived from a marketing orientation that anticipated that in order for HEIs to achieve their organisational goals successfully, the needs and wants of their target markets first had to be determined and the desired level of customer satisfaction delivered. The language of the marketplace and of marketing soon became an everyday part of the terminology used by HEIs (Stilwell, 2003). The adoption of marketing and business-like approaches by HEIs became necessary to comply with government requirements and attain positive positioning against rivals or they would face the possibility of losing market share (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006).

3.2.1 The service-dominant logic approach

This conceptualization of students as customers was an approach that HE management was initially somewhat reluctant to adopt (Ng and Forbes 2009). It was believed that the adoption of a marketing orientation (and viewing students as customers) was not compatible with the institutions' pedagogical objectives. However, Bowden (2011) explained that view was not valid because both sets of objectives could be attained at the same time. Considering what is called the service-dominant logic (S-D L) approach, as outlined by Vargo and Lusch (2004), customers can be identified as coproducers of services and as active participants in service exchanges. They are key in the coproduction of value in interactions in these exchanges. The role of management is to actively work with, support and interact with their customers (Bowden, 2011). Marketing is the process of undertaking activities in participation with the customer to create, foster, and maintain relationships to obtain mutual value (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). The S-D L framework, when applied to the HE context, highlights the need for a collaborative relationship between the HEI and the students. Both the institution and the student body are then inherently linked in the production of the service and in value creation (Lusch and Wu, 2012). This thesis will therefore take the viewpoint of the student as both a customer and as a coproducer of the HE service.

3.2.2 The adoption of traditional marketing-based approaches in HE

The HE marketing literature over the past three decades has shown that a traditional marketing approach has been widely applied within the sector. Focussing on the student decision-making process and on key factors that students use to choose institutions (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006), HEIs applied marketing approaches in the main, to acquire students (Hesketh and Knight, 1999; Maringe, 2006). The adoption of the traditional marketing mix concept by HEIs, which has a transactional focus, was used to support HEIs, in order to capture new prospective students (Maringe, 2006). The transactional focus of marketing is philosophy that focuses its efforts on making individual sales in the short-term (Aijo, 1996). Perhaps more significantly there is an important assumption made about the passivity of buyers and comparatively homogeneous markets (Ballantyne et al., 2003).

According to Gummesson (1994) the overall philosophy of transactional marketing was to win new groups of customers, rather than develop any collaborative cooperation with them (Ford, 1997). For Sheth (2002) a transactional exchange is characterised as being short-term in nature, or as a one-time exchange with no real commitment coming customers beyond that interaction. However, the use of the transactional marketing mix approach is more recently criticised because of its inability to deal with a variety of issues. These issues include demanding customers; business-to-business and inter-organisational marketing; the increasing importance of quality perception; and little focus or concern about customer retention (Harwood and Garry, 2006).

Ivy and Naude (2004) explained that the marketing mix consists of a set of controllable variables that an HEI may use to produce the response required from various stakeholders. These variables include: Product, Price, Place and Promotion, also known as the 4Ps. Using an example of the marketing mix approach, the 'place', element of the mix concerns the aspect of making education available and accessible to students in places when and in ways in which they want to study. This aspect was often accentuated by HEIs as a key selling point (Ivy and Naude, 2004).

Another marketing concept that was widely adopted was that of the customer decision-making process. Donaldson and McNicholas (2004) explained that as PGT programmes are purchased infrequently, and in terms of both time and money, are expensive these purchases are of great importance to students. They should be considered to be high involvement products (Schiffman and Kanuck, 2004). Wilkins and Epps (2011) explain that high involvement purchasing behaviour, requires a consumer to typically look for as much information as possible to inform their choices and purchase decision making. Students may consider there to be a higher level of risk for a high involvement decision such as choosing a PGT programme and are therefore likely to search for more information

to reduce the risk (Simões and Soares 2010). This is the case for potential students when choosing a university programme. Students will look to recommendations garnered from their most trusted sources of information when choosing a programme or university. Word of Mouth (WOM) or electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM) can be seen to be important in helping students reduce this risk (Sweeney et al., 2007), and is known to have much higher levels of credibility, empathy and relevance to customers (Towers and Towers, 2020). As choosing a PGT programme and HEI can be seen to be a complex buying decision with an extended decision process, it could take the student a significant amount of time to work their way through it. There could be many influencers and no straightforward way to influence students (Moe and Trusov, 2011) Therefore HEIs needed to conduct research to develop their marketing communications strategies with promotional messages, methods and media chosen to maximise their impact in each stage of the buying decision process. In more recent years HEIs have turned with increasing frequency to the use of social media to communicate with and build relationships with students (Smedescu, 2014) as it has far greater credibility as a source of information for them.

3.2.3 Branding and reputation in HEIs

Most UK HEIs adopted marketing initiatives, such as the use of a brand names to target groups of prospective students in an effort to influence their decision-making processes (Maringe, 2006). Nicolescu (2009) considered that for HE, branding can have both product and promotion policy elements. In HE, the connection between elements such brand, reputation and image have to be considered. Although branding and reputation share some commonality, they are not the same concept. This is because reputation is more often considered to have been developed over a period of time, whilst a brand can be considered to be something that is simply put together relatively quickly (Chapleo 2004). Kantanen (2007) felt that reputation could be perceived to be the collective demonstration of past images of an HEI developed in the long term, however a brand and its image, is the instant set of meanings that can be directly attributable to an HEI. It would seem that reputation better reflects the actual reality than any brand does (Chapleo, 2004). Reputation is seen to reflect the actual being of an HEI, in terms of what it does every day (Temple & Shattock, 2007) therefore it is more suitable for the HE sector. After all branding is often just seen as the creation of images to encourage sales. The HE sector faces particular difficulties with branding because of the great amount of similarity within the sector and thus faces difficulty in differentiation and positioning. Temple and Shattock (2007) explained that in terms of branding, the majority of UK HEIs are doing the same thing as their competitors, highlighting the same aspects of achievement, quality and excellence with no evidence of anything particularly unique.

3.2.4 Segmentation of the HE market

A key challenge faced by HEIs is catering to the needs of an increasingly diverse group of students that include a growing segment of students from non-traditional backgrounds, international students, mature students and students who are looking to achieve very specific objectives (Mavondo et al. 2004; Veloutsou et.al., 2004; Lundberg, 2003). In these circumstances it would seem very unlikely that applying an undifferentiated service strategy or choosing a strategy that is aimed to meet the service requirements of every student, will meet the needs of these groups appropriately (Mavondo et al., 2004). The failure of HEIs to meet the service expectations of students could exacerbate problems related to student retention (Dailey, et al. 2006). Applying the principles of segmentation and those of target marketing are appropriate when operating in competitive markets of consumers with diverse needs (Kara and Kaynak, 1997; Kotler, 2003). In fact, as Helmsley-Brown and Oplatka (2015) explain, the HE market is often segmented like various others, using demographic, geographic, social and behavioural factors. There are some benefits for HEIs which use segmentation and target marketing principles routinely in their strategic and tactical decision-making (Ghosh et al.,2008). For example, an ongoing assessment of market segments can assist HEIs in understanding the changing nature of the student segments and support them in developing appropriate programmes and service strategies. Additionally, targeted strategies can be applied in order to differentiate an HEI's service offerings and support the development of a differential advantage in competitive marketplaces (Kotler, 2003).

3.2.5 Positioning in the HE market

Market positioning is defined by Fumasoli and Huisman (2013) as

> '*the process through which HEIs locate themselves in specific niches within the HE system*' (p160).

The niche outlines the activities (teaching, research) and resources (e.g. financial, human) that the HEI occupies, including the relationships (competition, cooperation) with the other HEIs that share the same position or a similar position. The positioning of an HEI informs what and how it performs relative to the other institutions in the HE sector (Barbato and Turri, 2019).

Positioning withing the HE market involves three key elements: the development of an institutional brand or image, targeting market segments and development of a communication strategy that stresses the HEI's ability to deliver to this market. Understanding the choice and decisions of prospective students' links to the HEI's positioning strategy through a clear identification of their purchase behaviour (Maringe, 2006).

3.3 From traditional marketing to relationship marketing (RM) approaches

The philosophy behind the RM approach as an alternative to transactional marketing approach, is to produce customer value during the lifetime of the relationship between the provider and customer (Grönroos, 1994; Gummesson, 2015).

As outlined earlier, due to increasing market competition in the HE sector (Foskett and Maringe, 2010) HEIs needed to change their focus away from the traditional application of marketing principles, centred around acquiring new students, to focusing on the retention of them instead (Tinto, 2007). In the services sector, the RM concept is regarded as a business philosophy with a key orientation that focuses on keeping and improving relationships with its current customers (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2016; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003). This would seem to make sense for HEIs, as improvements in student retention rates can positively influence HEI revenues (Reichheld, 1996). The outcome of developing relationships is customer retention, positive referral, an increased likelihood of repurchasing, and more importantly, customer loyalty (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002; Palmatier et al. 2006; Reichheld 2003). Customer retention (also customer loyalty) is understood to provide the link between customer satisfaction and the financial performance of an organisation (Zeithaml, 2000; Helgesen, 2008). Customers can be said to be satisfied when they are offered products and services that meet their needs and offer them customer value. RM holds as its basis, that customer value should be created as an ongoing process over the lifetime of the relationship (Grönroos, 1994; Gummesson, 1997; Egan, 2004). In addition to this, it can be shown that satisfied and loyal customers can assist in attracting others through positive WOM endorsements (Reichheld, 1996; Sheth, 2002).

These points are extremely relevant to the management of HEIs who needed to find new ways to sustain their market share and positioning in the long term. According to Grönroos (1994), RM had become the new paradigm for marketing related activities. With increasing global competition amongst HEIs, the importance of retaining enrolled students became equal to attracting and enrolling them (Elliott and Healy, 2001). As Ravald and Grönroos (1996) outlined, the concern was not only to attract new '*customers*' but to keep them and take care of them.

3.3.1 Defining RM

It would seem that there is no absolute definition for RM that all researchers can agree on, however several have been put forward over the years (Berry, 1983; Grönroos, 1990; Christopher et al., 1991; Evans and Laskin, 1994; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Morgan and Hunt (1994) offered the following useful definition:

> '*RM refers to all marketing activities toward establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges*' (p. 22).

Sheth, Parvatiyar and Sinha (2015) offered a more recent definition of RM which explained that it was as process whereby engagement in cooperative activities with end-users and customers occurred in order to create or enhance mutual value profitably.

RM was first introduced in the early 1980s (Berry, 2002) but became more a more dominant force within marketing in the 1990s (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2002). RM today can be seen to be used within both industrial and service markets; the relational aspects of marketing can be found in all types of organisations (Grönroos, 2004; Ang and Buttle, 2006). Despite considerable debate and interest in the RM concept over the previous two decades, Egan (2004) considered that RM is still perceived as being an *'umbrella philosophy'* due to it having various relational perspectives rather than it being one integrated concept with specifically developed objectives and strategies. As an umbrella concept it emphasises the need to view relational exchange from a longer-term perspective, rather than from a short-term one (Palmer, 2002).

There has been some criticism over the lack of consensus in clearly defining the nature of the RM construct (Gummesson, 1994; Zolkiewski, 2004; Marandi and Robson, 2008). The fact that RM seems to include a wide variety of activities, provides an impression that it might have different meanings for different researchers (Palmer and Bejou, 1994; Morris et al., 1998).

3.3.2 RM in HE

There is considerable research in existence (Palmatier et al., 2006) with regard to RM as a strategic option for firms to pursue. However, the research has been conducted, in the main, with service organisations for example in the banking, hospitality, retail and health sectors (Bowden, 2011). The application of the RM paradigm as a means to engage students in the HE sector has not been employed to a great extent. It would appear that there is some hesitancy within the sector to apply these principles, even those that could potentially assist decision making. This may be due to the perception that HE seems different to conventional products and services (Litten, 1980; Ng and Forbes 2009). Only limited attention has also been placed considering the development and nature of the relationships between students and HEIs. This is despite the many calls to specifically investigate the role of RM in the establishment of student loyalty (Helgesen, 2008).

However, some initial research by Yang et al. (2008) into the HE sector has demonstrated that RM principles can be applied to the HE context. They found that students did in fact understand that they were in a relationship with the HEI and that that the HEI planned to maintain a long-lasting link with them. Yang et al. (2008) also found that the quality of the student and HEI relationship was a key

force behind students' positive perceptions of the HEI's brand. Positive management of the student and HEI relationship is therefore crucial because students, can in fact, either act as detractors or as loyalists toward the HEI. In other words, they can either recommend the HEI and possibly return to it as alumni, or pass on negative WOM (Reichheld, 1996, 2003). The relationship an HEI has with its students has the possibility of leading to positive reputation development in the HE marketplace (Yang et al., 2008).

Despite the importance to HEIs of adopting an RM approach, empirical research with regard to the relational determinants of constructs such as loyalty such as satisfaction, trust, and commitment within the sector remains somewhat limited (Al-Alak, 2006; Helgesen, 2008; Shah, 2009; Bowden, 2011). Research carried out by Al-Alak (2006) examined the marketing actions (antecedents) and performances (consequences) of relationship quality in an HE setting and as an outcome he offered the following definition of RM in HE:

> *'RM is a set of marketing activities or actions that attract, motivate, and enhance existing and potential students' relationships as well as students' parents, relatives, friends, reference groups for the benefit of all sides concerned, emphasizing retaining existing students until their graduation, and attracting further students' (p. 4).*

As Al-Alak (2006) explained, his definition of RM in HE is somewhat different to the definitions of others. His definition considers student acquisition and retention and ensures that the HEI's efforts are focused on not only the students but on others who may influence the student too. Al-Alak (2006) posits that the survival of the HEI is dependent upon its capacity for attracting, acquiring and retaining students throughout the length of their programmes until they graduate.

Other papers relating to RM in the HE setting have been published, which address some key topics. These include: the impact of new programme offerings on reducing student attrition and increasing student retention (Sauer and O'Donnell, 2006), the relationship between universities and students (Svensson and Wood, 2007), using an RM approach to identify, select and recruit students (Beneke and Human, 2010), RM and management theory in enrolment training (Vander Schee, 2010), engaging students as customers (Bowden, 2011), student attraction and retention as benefits of the RM approach (Moore and Bowden-Everson, 2012), concepts of HE service quality, students satisfaction and loyalty using the HESQUAL scale (Teeroovengadum et al., 2019). Thus, it is evident that more attention is being paid to RM and its associated concepts in HE in recent years, however to date, no literature has been published to date which specifically addresses the use of RM in the management of the student transition process.

3.4 Key constructs of RM

The RM approach has been adopted by some HEIs as a way to engage and sustain their students (Helgesen, 2008; Linvill et al., 2015). RM in HE can be considered to be the relationship that commences when first contact is made by the student with an HEI, through transition to the university experience and eventually onto the alumni stage (Kotler and Fox, 1995; Vander Schee, 2010). It can be described as a long term or even a lifetime relationship. Gibbs (2001) stated that those working within HE should be developing and creating educational relationships rather than conducting a transactional deal between parties. Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2006) felt that an RM strategy is compatible for HE services since the idea promotes student involvement in the image building and marketing of the organisation.

It is therefore important to clearly address what determines the success of the relationship. The academic literature has outlined various constructs that have been identified by different authors that relate to RM. These constructs include satisfaction, service quality, experiences, perceived value, reputation and image, commitment, loyalty, WOM communication and trust (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002; Dagger and O'Brien, 2010; Sharma and Madan, 2015).

3.4.1 Trust and confidence benefits

Trust between the customer and the provider is believed to exist if the customer believes that a service provider is dependable and has integrity (Moorman et al., 1992; Morgan and Hunt, 1994) and they can be relied upon in terms of their honesty which will lead to fulfilment of promises (Baron et al., 2010; Zhang and Lv, 2013). For example, HEIs fulfilling promises made to students during the application stage of the cycle. Trust has been seen to be an essential component to building long-term relationships (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; Doney and Cannon, 1997). According to Hennig - Thurau et al. (2002) so called "confidence benefits", are RM aspects related very closely to trust. Confidence benefits relate to perceptions of knowing what to expect, helping to reduce anxiety in the service encounter and building trust in the service provider. Berry (1995) explained that trust reduces uncertainty and vulnerability especially in service settings. According to Hennig -Thurau at al. (2002) and Gwinner and Gremler (2015), trust provides benefits to customers (students) that fosters their satisfaction, commitment and loyalty towards the relationship.

3.4.2 Perceived value

By allocating resources to activities that are important to students, HEIs may increase the value offered and thus increase student retention (Helgesen, 2008). As Ravald and Grönroos (1996) highlighted, value is considered to be an important outcome of RM and the ability to provide

superior value to customers has been determined as one of the most successful competitive strategies and an important means of organisational differentiation. Kotler (2003), defined perceived value as

> 'the difference between the prospective customer's evaluation of all benefits and all the costs of an offering and the perceived alternatives' (p.60).

In a study conducted by Helgesen (2008), the following factors were considered to be vital in determining student value included: service quality, facilities available, IT (information technology), and social activities. These factors were found to be positively related to both student satisfaction and HEI reputation (Helgesen, 2008).

3.4.3 Special treatment benefits

Many service organisations provide so called "special treatment benefits" to loyal customers which are then thought to have a beneficial effect on satisfaction, commitments and loyalty (Selnes, 1993). According to Gremler and Gwinner (2015) the use of special treatment benefits occurs when loyal customers, who have developed a relationship with the service provider, get better deals such as special discounts than others, as a result of the long-term nature of their relationship. Such benefits can include special pricing or loyalty discounts.

3.4.4 Rapport and social benefits

Some researchers have suggested that "social benefits" can be closely connected to the customer's (student's) commitment to a relationship (Gwinner and Gremler, 2015; Goodwin and Gremler, 1996). Hennig Thurau et al. (2002) explained that social benefits may also affect customer satisfaction with a service provider. Social benefits are closely connected to the rapport experienced between customers and employees. This rapport could also be used to develop and maintain customer loyalty (Berry, 1995).

3.4.5 HEI service quality

Service quality has been defined by Parasuraman et al. (1988) as

> "a form of attitude related but not equivalent to satisfaction, and results from comparison of expectations with perceptions of performance" (p. 15)

This concept in HE is understood to be the student's evaluation of service provider's performance, based on their prior experience and impressions (Hennig- Thurau et al, 2002). The importance of quality for long-term success is largely undoubted (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Rust and Oliver 1994),

and researchers have clearly shown links between service quality, loyalty and word-of-mouth communication behaviour (Zeithaml et al., 1996).

Research into service quality within the HE sector has significantly increased over the past two decades. As competition in the education sector becomes more intense, many providers focus on 'customer orientation' by providing excellent service quality (Wright, 2000). As HE provision is a service which students are expected to pay for, it seems appropriate that universities change from being 'product-led' towards having a more 'customer-led 'orientation (Angell et al., 2008). When considering an uncertain and high-risk decision such as choosing a university, students will try to find some evidence of service quality (Donaldson and McNicholas, 2004). Perceptions of service quality are affected by factors such as communications, social referrals, information collected, and the trustworthiness consumers perceive with regard to a particular service organisation (Gounaris et al., 2003).

According to the study by Teeroovengadum et al. (2019) it was found that when students are evaluating the HE service, it is the campus facilities, administrative procedures and physical infrastructure which are more important to them. Some research studies (Alves and Raposo, 2007; Brown and Mazzarol, 2009; Chitty and Soutar, 2004) found that a university's image affects students' perceptions of value, satisfaction and loyalty. However, others have argued that university image is developed mainly by quality (Grönroos, 1984), or is an outcome of value, quality (Nguyen and LeBlanc, 1998) and satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2001).

Berry et al. (1990) saw consumers (students) as being the only judges of service quality. In terms of how service quality is actually assessed, Berry et al. (1985) concluded that consumer perceptions of service quality came from comparing their expectations before receiving the service, to the actual experience of the service. Not unexpectedly, if consumer expectations were met, then service quality was perceived to be satisfactory; if expectations were not met, then service quality was perceived to be unsatisfactory; however, if expectations were exceeded, quality was considered to have delighted the consumer.

3.4.6 Student experiences and satisfaction

As Elliott and Shin (2002) outlined in their research, student satisfaction is linked to enhanced learning experiences. It could be argued that student satisfaction leads to loyalty and a long-lasting relationship between HEIs and students, this is particularly in the case for the post-graduation activities of alumni (Elliott and Shin, 2002; Bejou, 2005). Satisfied students and alumni help to market the HEI by sharing their positive learning experiences and by engaging in positive WOM communication, which in turn assists in attracting new students (Al-Alak, 2006; Helgesen and Nesset,

2007; Voss, 2009). HEIs are now proactively using student satisfaction as a tool whereby they can differentiate themselves from one another (Li, 2014). Student satisfaction is a key factor in terms of an HEI's positioning in league tables (Jones, 2010) and has therefore become a fundamental source of competitive advantage in educational markets. Participation by UK HEIs in the Post Graduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), which provides feedback on student satisfaction with their PGT programmes, is growing each year (Li, 2014) with many HEIs investing a greater amount into the student experience.

In 2007, a Unite survey found that the impact of league tables on an HEI's reputation was a key deciding factor upon a student's choice of university. An important source of student complaint was a mismatch between their expectations of a programme prior to its commencement and their perceptions of the actual reality of the programme and the services provided (Longden, 2006). HEIs increasing need to show that they are offering value for money and quality provision in terms of managing the student experience (Jones, 2010).

3.4.7 Institutional reputation and brand image

Reputation can be considered as the overall perception of an institution, what it stands for, is associated with, and what can be gained from buying its products or services (MacMillan et al., 2005). Favourable perceptions of reputation can be seen to be positively related to customer loyalty (Johnson et al., 2001; MacMillan et al., 2005). Therefore, reputation management is considered to be vital in attracting and retaining students (Standifird, 2005).

Image is the general impression about an institution that any individual who knows about it retains in their minds (Barich and Kotler, 1991). Empirical findings from various service settings provide evidence in favour of a positive relationship between service quality and image (Cheng et al., 2008; Lai et al., 2009) They further suggest that image creates a halo effect on customers' judgement about satisfaction, as customers tend to have a preconceived idea about the products and services which stay in their minds. Masserini et al. (2018) found evidence that image was a strong predictor of student satisfaction in the higher education context.

University brands have been regarded as an indicator of quality in the education sector (Judson et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2008). A strong university brand can lead to perception of excellent quality (Palacio et al.,2002), enabling the university to regard itself as a top, leading, or world-class university (Belanger et al., 2002). In Casidy's (2014) study it was found that the effects of service quality on satisfaction were not significantly affected by students' perceptions of the HEI's brand orientation. However, the study found evidence that the effect of service quality on student loyalty and positive

WOM communication behaviour is stronger among those who perceived the university to be strongly brand oriented than those who did not.

3.4.8 Commitment

The concept of commitment can be described as

"an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship" (Moorman et al., 1992, p. 316),

Commitment is therefore a students' long-term orientation toward a business relationship that is grounded in both emotional bonds and in a belief that remaining in the relationship will deliver greater benefits than by ending it (Geyskens et al. 1996; Söllner 1994). In a study conducted by Pritchard et al., (1999) there was strong support for commitment as an important direct antecedent of customer loyalty. Commitment is also believed to strongly affect positive WOM behaviour (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002).

3.4.9 Loyalty

According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2002) the most commonly cited RM outcome is customer loyalty. Student loyalty has increasingly become an important strategic theme for HEIs (Helgesen and Nesset, 2007; Sauer and O'Donnell, 2006). There are several factors which contribute to making student loyalty an important issue for HEIs, such as increased student mobility and increased global competition.

In the context of HE, customer loyalty could be regarded as student matriculation and retention (up to graduation) and so creating value for students through their experience of HE, enhanced by RM, is therefore significant (Helgesen, 2008). As more value is added to the core 'product', its quality is improved and as more support services are included, customer satisfaction is increased, bonds are strengthened and customer loyalty is achieved (Ravald and Grönroos, 1996). Consequently, both the satisfaction students experience, and the reputation of the provider are important for loyalty, especially for professional providers of services (Sevier, 1994; Bush et al., 1998; Çetin, 2003). Increased competition in the HE sector means that HEIs have to strive to maintain student loyalty (Pham and Lai, 2016). The findings suggest that university management can ensure loyalty behaviour by improving students' perceptions of the image, the value of and satisfaction with their institution.

3.4.10 Word of Mouth (WOM) and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) communication

WOM communication concerns the extent to which students talk to their friends about their university subsequent to their enrolment (Casidy, 2014). WOM sources are important as they can also include parents, career advisors and others that students' have close and trusted relationships

with (Le et al., 2020). Agents can also have a key influential role for international students in particular (Havergal, 2015). WOM has long been considered a critical and credible source of information for consumers and is a powerful tool for universities (Lang and Lawson, 2013).

Studies have found both direct and indirect associations between students' perceptions of service quality and their positive WOM communication behaviour (Bruce and Edgington, 2008; Carter, 2009). In addition, with the emergence of digital communication channels such as social media and the internet, these have become increasingly important sources of information used by students (Obermeit, 2012). Social media supports customer-to-customer communications but is more social in nature and influences students' decision-making (Galan et al., 2015; Jones and Runyan 2016). Social media can be classified as an electronic WOM (e-WOM) source (Mangold and Smith 2012), with prospective students making use of online reviews.

Today, HEIs need to fully understand the communication preferences of their students and how they use e-WOM, such as social media, the web, and e-mail, when researching university programmes and services. An increased understanding of these preferences will ensure that HEIs craft better communication strategies (Copeland and Routhier, 2012). HEIs are seen to be utilising social media more often as a promotion vehicle in order to assist with student recruitment (Bélanger et al., 2014; Rutter et al., 2016) therefore, social media and online reviews can be reasonably considered to be information sources for marketing purposes.

3.4.11 Customer relationship management (CRM) systems

Campbell and Narduzzi (2015) outline that the implementation of CRM systems can help HEIs to build stronger relationships with their student applicants through greater engagement which allows for internal communication between various marketing, recruitment and academic departments, access to the same data. This helps to facilitate better decision making through the provision of real-time data and helps the HEI to analyse the effectiveness of its marketing campaigns by tracking conversion rates at all stages. These CRM systems can be used to send out automated, customised emails and other messages to applicants very quickly and effectively (Solomon et al., 2019)

3.5 Models of RM

The following RM models, whilst they are not all related to HE specifically, they do relate to long term relationship development and retention in some way. The models will be considered in turn to identify which will fit with the research aims and objectives of this study.

The first model is the Relationship Effects Model or REM (Crosby and Stephens, 1987). This model was developed for the insurance industry and considers that that RM is not directly significant to the

initial sale because its effects are on satisfaction and therefore retention. Its emphasis was to find better models of relationship development and value determination. This is model was not considered to be suitable for application to this study as it was more relevant to satisfaction and retention outcomes. There was little importance placed on the actual relationship process which is an important factor for this study.

The second model to be considered for application to this study was the Relationship Quality Model or RQM (Al-Alak, 2008). Several variables where addressed by the model which included: student orientation, relational orientation, mutual disclosure, service provider attributes, satisfaction, trust, relationship quality, relationship continuity and WOM. It was argued that all of these variables are important in creating added value for students leading to satisfaction, trust and relationship continuity and trust. However, whilst the model was developed for the HE environment, it did not address some key RM factors such as service quality, value, rapport which have a bearing on long term student loyalty and commitment which were felt to be important relational factors in this study. Therefore, this model was not adopted for this study.

The third model considered for application to this study was the Determinants of Key RM Outcomes Model (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). This model was developed to combine relational benefits and customer loyalty perspectives and considers how these factors may influence the relational outcomes of customer loyalty and WOM communication. The relational factors identified: social benefits (rapport), confidence benefits (trust) and special treatment benefits (loyalty benefits) were considered and their effects on satisfaction, commitment, customer loyalty and WOM communications measured. Whilst this model was not specifically developed for the HE, it is applicable as the concepts it identifies contribute significantly to RM outcomes in services settings such as HE. (Please refer to Figure 3.1 below).

In their study, Hennig Thurau et al. (2002) found that four constructs had a direct impact on customer loyalty, these were found to be satisfaction, commitment, trust and social benefits. However, rather unsurprisingly, satisfaction was found to have the strongest direct impact on loyalty.

This model will be adapted for this research and additional RM constructs reviewed in the literature will be included in the conceptual framework presented in section 3.8. The additional constructs include perceived value, service quality, reputation and image.

Figure 3.1. Integrative Model of the Determinants of Key RM Outcomes (model based on Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002, p.235)
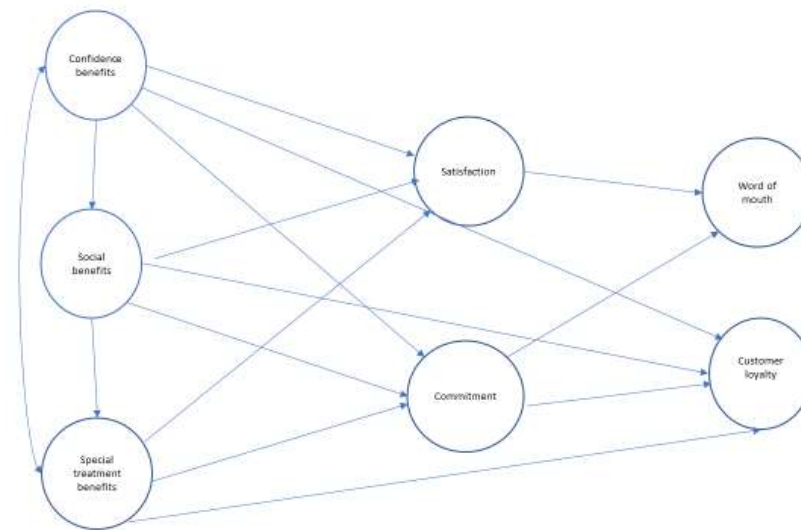
3.6 Research questions

This section outlines the research questions that have been formulated for this research based on the stages of transition outlined in chapter two and the RM factors outlined in this literature review chapter. A proposed new conceptual framework is presented for this study (Figure 3.2), based upon an adaptation of the Hennig Thurau et al.'s (2002) Integrative Model of the Determinants of RM Outcomes (see Figure 3.1) which has been amalgamated with an adaptation of the Schlossberg et al. (1995) Model of Transition (see Figure 2.2). The proposed framework is based on the two models and the RM literature reviewed in both this chapter and the literature on transition in chapter two. The framework forms the theoretical basis for the research to be undertaken and is linked to the six research questions which have been developed for this research. The concepts of RM and student transition have not been used together before; therefore, this research will make an original contribution to the existing academic literature. Taking a practical perspective, it is hoped that this research will afford guidance to HEIs in offering support their PGT students, through the transition process using RM principles, towards successful outcomes in their chosen programmes and onwards into the commencement of their careers and as active, loyal alumni for the HEI.

Based on the literature on student transition and RM principles reviewed in chapters two and three, the following research questions have been devised in order to meet the aims and objectives of this thesis:

RQ1. How do RM factors impact upon students' motivations and influence their choices when transitioning to PGT study?

RQ2. Which RM factors influence students' expectations, experiences and perceptions of the value of PGT programmes?

RQ3. Which RM factors induce relationship building, networking activities and strategies for PGT students?

RQ4. Which RM factors affect personal changes and positively impact upon students' self-identities during their PGT studies?

RQ5. How do programme and other support services affect PGT students' experiences and satisfaction during transition?

RQ6. How do university services support ongoing relationships and transitions into employment for PGT alumni?

3.7 Conceptual Framework (see Figure 3.2)

The conceptual model below links together the stages within the students' transitional journey (in boxes) which have been divided into the key transitional stages together with the research questions clearly identified at each stage. The RM factors that can affect and are affected by the various transitional stages are depicted in circles.

3.8 Chapter Summary

Overall, the review of the literature in Chapter 2 outlined that there is still a lack of research into the key areas discussed in relation to transition to postgraduate study. In this chapter, it has been explained that whilst the concept of relationship marketing (RM) has not been applied to consider transition into the PGT market before; it would seem that the benefits of implementing such strategies are likely to lead to successful long-term outcomes for both students and HEIs.

To conclude this chapter, it seems that the government-led initiatives that promote quasi-markets, along with the response and adjustment of HEIs towards more business-like approaches, are two fundamental forces that have closely interlinked and collectively fuelled the development of HE marketisation. As traditional marketing strategies are unable to provide HEIs with a competitive advantage for sustainable success in the long term, it has become necessary to investigate and

understand the essence of relationship marketing between HEIs and their students (Li, 2014). According to this way of thinking, the key drivers of student satisfaction, HEI reputation and the loyalty of students need to be identified (Helgesen, 2008). In this way, HEI marketers will be able to gain valuable insights regarding those activities that will create increased student value so that they can craft appropriate marketing campaigns. HEI managers will be able to gain insight into those processes that deliver value to students to assure quality outcomes. Of course, both the marketing messages and the students' actual lived experience, need to match.

No longer can HEIs afford to sit back and trade based on their past glories and reputations, they need to provide student-oriented services as soon as prospective students make programme enquiries. Also, PTES scores are the measures by which past, current and future learners judge universities, this reinforces the notion that student experience and student satisfaction does not finish after enrolment, or even beyond graduation (Eagle and Brennan, 2007; Thomas, 2011).

These radical changes in HE need HEIs to not to dwell on offering purely academic experiences (i.e. from a university-oriented perspective as a knowledge provider). Instead, they aim to make students the focus of HEI service provision (i.e., from a student-centric perspective), for lifelong learning and social responsibilities (i.e., from a long-term orientation).

It is hoped that this thesis will contribute to the body of knowledge on both the transition experience of PGT students and the application of RM principles. Both areas are currently somewhat under-researched as outlined in the literature review chapters.

Figure 3. 2. An amalgamated model of Transition and RM Factors (based on Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) Model of Transition and Hennig -Thurau et al.'s (2002) Integrative Model of the Determinants of Key RM Outcomes)

Pre-transition
(Moving In)

During transition
(Moving Through)

Post transition
(Moving Out)
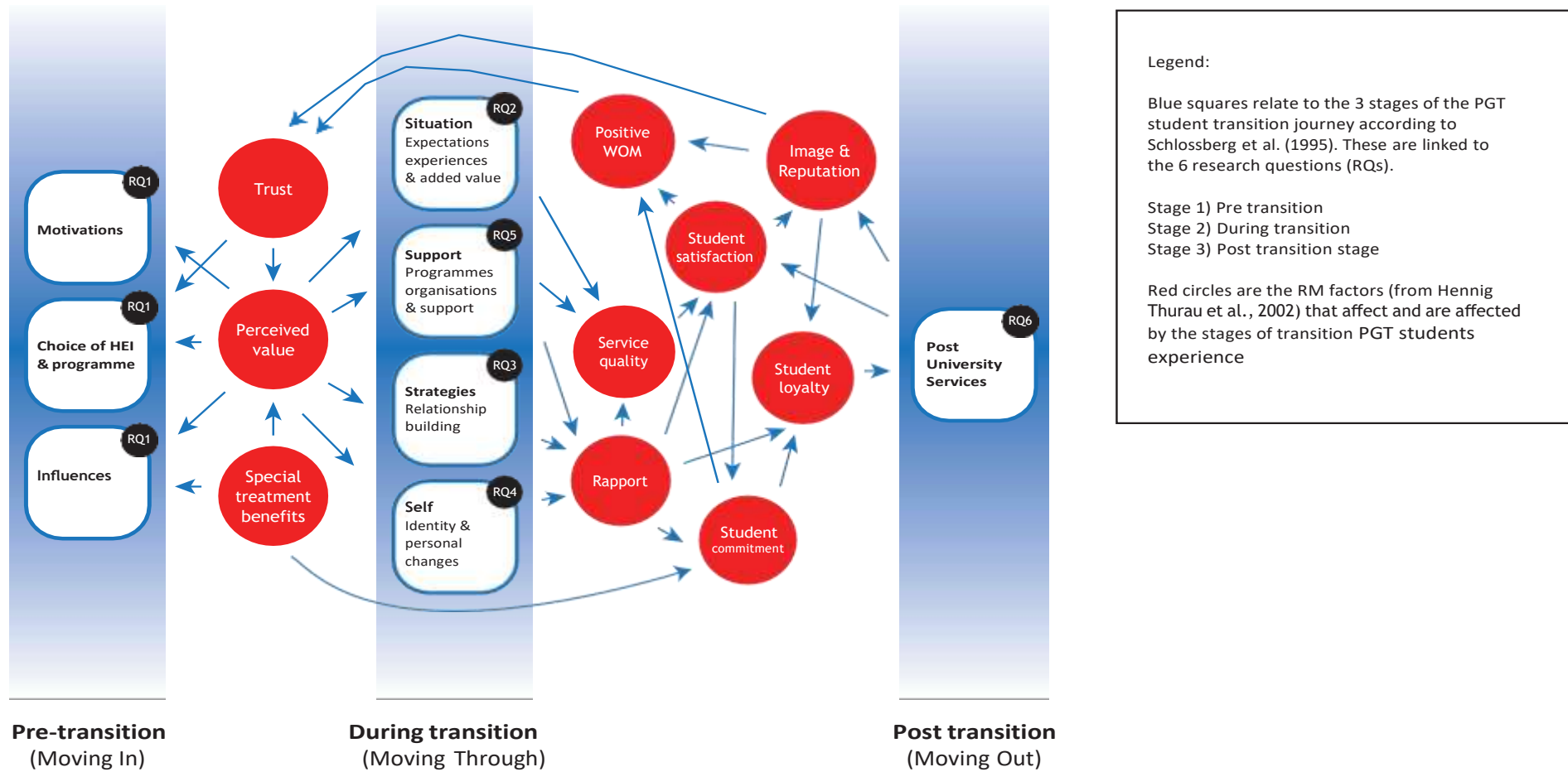
Legend:

Blue squares relate to the 3 stages of the PGT student transition journey according to Schlossberg et al. (1995). These are linked to the 6 research questions (RQs).

Stage 1) Pre transition
Stage 2) During transition
Stage 3) Post transition stage

Red circles are the RM factors (from Hennig Thurau et al., 2002) that affect and are affected by the stages of transition PGT students experience

Chapter 4. Methodology

4.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methods adopted in this thesis, firstly by revisiting the research study's aim and objectives. Following on from this, ontological and epistemological stances are compared and outlined. The theoretical debates surrounding research design are considered and the research design adopted is outlined, together with a description of how the data were collected. In addition, this chapter will describe access to the data and ethical considerations. The research design used in this thesis adopted an interpretive philosophical position, a primarily inductive approach and a qualitative case study research strategy, in order to suggest avenues for further research exploration.

The research design developed for this thesis consisted of three case studies based on qualitative data collected from separate cohorts of students: from PGT students in two different year groups and one group of UG students due to undergo transition to PGT study. These groups of students were selected using a purposive sampling approach. The groups were selected in order to explore the differences and similarities of their transition expectations and experiences. The principal methods used to gather data for this research were semi-structured interviews and secondary documentation. The materials and data gathered for the case studies were managed, stored, organised and coded using the software NVivo version 12 and, data was analysed using a four-stage thematic analysis coding process (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Data coding and analysis techniques used will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

4.1 Research aim and objectives

Whilst the overall aim and objectives of this thesis have been discussed previously, it is important to revisit them prior to discussing the research philosophy, overall methodology and the specific methods used to collect data. The research aim and objectives of the thesis seek to address gaps in the existing literature on PGT student transition and the application of RM principles to support students through the transition process. As outlined in the first chapter and to recap, it can be seen that despite the rapid growth in the UK HE sector and the increasing importance of postgraduate students to the sector, that students' transition to postgraduate taught (PGT) study suffers from a distinct paucity of research across a range of issues (Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013). According to the literature previously reviewed, surprisingly little is known about the students entering postgraduate study, how they make the transition to postgraduate programmes, their expectations and experiences associated with the entry process and experiences of the programmes (Wakeling, 2005).

In light of this, the aim of the thesis is to explore the issues around students' transition to PGT programmes and discover, through the application of relationship marketing (RM) approaches, how PGT student recruitment, retention, satisfaction and ultimate success can be ensured. Following on from this aim, more specific research objectives for this thesis were formulated:

- To determine how transitioning PGT students' motivation and choice of university and programme can be influenced by RM factors.

- To ascertain how PGT students' expectations, experiences and self - identities are influenced during the transition process and whether RM factors can help.

- To determine the extent to which programme organisation and activities support transitioning PGT students towards satisfactory outcomes and long-term relationships with the HEI.

Following a detailed review of the extant literature, it can be seen that prior conceptual and empirical research has not been utilised to explore how RM principles could be applied within the context of supporting PGT student transition. There is also a lack of empirical literature pertaining to the student experience of PGT transition overall. This study therefore seeks to address the gaps in the literature by using RM as a theoretical framework to support the student PGT transition experience.

4.2 Ontological and Epistemological stances

This section provides an explanation for the subjectivist ontological and interpretivist epistemological stance adopted for this research study.

Research is a systematic process of enquiry, expected to lead to the discovery of new knowledge. Grinnell (1993) explained that research uses acceptable scientific approaches in order that problems can be solved and new knowledge that is generally applicable can be created. There are four fundamental philosophical assumptions that can be made in order to assist the investigation process, these are: ideology, ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Kitchen and Tate, 2013).

Ideology is described as the underlying reason for seeking knowledge (Kitchen and Tate, 2000). Ontology, according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2015), concerns assumptions of ideas about how the world operates, the nature of reality and its existence. Epistemology considers how knowledge is derived and whether it is acceptable in a field of study (Saunders et al., 2019). The epistemological assumption helps researchers to understand how knowledge about reality can be discovered, whilst addressing relationships between researchers and reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2009). Methodology consists of the choice of methods or procedures used to investigate a situation or a phenomenon

(Kitchen and Tate, 2013). Social scientists generally draw from differing ontological and epistemological assumptions when developing methodologies for conducting their research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). It can be argued therefore, that ideology, ontology, epistemology and methodology are fundamental to a systematic enquiry process, with close links between these key elements of research.

According to Gill and Johnson (2010), the researcher needs to make important decisions about the approach that is adopted. The decisions made are more complex than only choosing an appropriate methodology. The philosophical assumptions which influenced how themes were developed should be clearly understood. As Johnson and Clark (2006) noted, the business and management researcher must be fully aware of the philosophical commitments they make in terms of their chosen research strategy, because this has significant impact not only on what they do but on what they understand they are investigating. According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) the researcher needs to identify those research designs which will or will not work, and to recognise, and even build, designs that may be outside their previous experience.

For Johnson and Clark (2006), the key issue is about how well the researcher can reflect upon the philosophical choices they have made and defend them in relation to the alternative approaches that could have been adopted.

4.2.1 Ontological and epistemological stances adopted for this research

This research adopts a subjectivist ontological perspective, where the viewpoint is that social phenomena are created from the observations and resultant actions of the social participants (Saunders et al., 2019). It follows an interpretivist (constructionist) epistemology and a research philosophy which seeks to explore the subjective meanings behind the actions of the social actors, so they can be better understood. Remenyi et al. (1998) explain the need to study the details of a situation in order to understand the reality within the situation. This approach is often associated with the term constructivism, following on from the interpretivist philosophy (Saunders et al., 2019).

4.3 Comparing research philosophies

Various research philosophies have been proposed by researchers, however Candy (1989), suggested three main groupings, Positivist, Interpretivist, or (Critical) Realist philosophies. However, Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) proposed a fourth which borrowed elements from the other three, which has become known as the Pragmatic approach.

In this section, the main four main research philosophies will be compared and considered (Saunders et al., 2019). The research philosophy relates to the nature and development of a study underpinned

by the researcher's assumptions about how they perceive the world to be (Collis & Hussey, 2013). The research design is only clearly and properly implemented when the underlying philosophical assumptions are well understood and articulated (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Therefore, all aspects of a research study should be appropriately informed and underpinned by a clear research philosophy.

4.3.1 Positivism

Positivism was the term originally coined by Auguste Comte, a nineteenth century philosopher, who described the process through which scientific knowledge is generated (Watson, 1971). Comte (1853) suggested that,

"*there can be no real knowledge but that which is based on observed facts*" (p.3).

A key aspect of positivism is that the social world is seen to exist externally, its properties can be measured objectively, not inferred subjectively, i.e. through reflection, intuition or sensation (Easterby -Smith et al., 2015). Positivism searches for the causes behind a social phenomenon, without consideration of an individual's subjective state (Collis and Hussey, 2013). This means that only phenomena that can be observed lead to the production of credible data (Saunders et al., 2019).

Research undertaken following this philosophy relies on deductive logic, formulation of hypotheses, testing of hypotheses, offering operational definitions and mathematical equations, calculations, extrapolations and expressions, to derive conclusions. Neuman, (2011) explained that the positivist approach uses methods such as surveys, experiments and statistics. It aims to provide explanations and to make predictions based on measurable outcomes. Those measurable outcomes are underpinned by four assumptions that Cohen et al. (2000), explain are determinism, empiricism, parsimony and generalizability.

These four assumptions need to be explained in turn. The notion of determinism considers the observed events caused by other factors. If casual relationships among factors are to be understood, it is necessary to make predictions and control the possible impacts of the explanatory factors on the dependent factors. The notion of empiricism considers that in order to be able to investigate a research problem, it is necessary to collect verifiable empirical data to support the theoretical framework for the study and to test the formulated hypotheses. Parsimony refers to attempts to explain the phenomena under study in the most efficient way possible. The notion of generalizability ensures that the results obtained from a research project conducted in one context, should be applicable to other situations through inductive inference. It should be possible to observe occurrences in the particular phenomenon and be able to generalise about what can be expected

elsewhere in other contexts. The positivist philosophy supports the application of quantitative research methods in order to be precise in the data that are gathered, analysed and interpreted and to enable the researcher to understand the relationships rooted in the data (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). The positivist ontological assumption taken is that reality is external and objective, whilst its epistemological position is that knowledge is only of significance if it is based on observation of the external reality, the result of empirical verification (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Please refer to Table 4.1 below for a description of the key aspects of the positivist philosophical stance.

Table 4.1. Positivist philosophical assumptions (adapted from Easterby-Smith et al., 2015, p.52).

Independence	the observer should be independent from that which is being observed
Value-freedom	concerns choice of what and how to study phenomena, to be determined by objective criteria rather than by human beliefs and interests
Causality	the aim of social sciences should be to identify casual explanations and fundamental laws that explain regularities in human social behaviour
Hypothesis and deduction	science proceeds through the process of hypothesising fundamental laws and deducing what kinds of observations demonstrate the truth (or not) of these laws
Operationalisation	concepts need to be operationalised to enable facts to be measured quantitatively
Reductionism	problems are better understood if they are reduced into the simplest possible elements
Generalisation:	to generalise about behaviour, it is necessary to select samples of a sufficient size, from which wider inferences may be drawn about the population
Cross-sectional analysis	regularities can be identified by making comparisons of variations across samples

The positivist research approach was rejected for this thesis in favour of an interpretivist approach (the key aspects of interpretivism are highlighted in Table 4.2 below). The choice of approach for this study developed from an ontology that is subjective and an epistemology that is interactive. In the case of this research the aim was to determine the reality based on the experiences of the participants in their social setting, not necessarily to measure it.

4.3.1.1 Post positivism

As researchers struggled with the understanding that it was not always possible to apply key aspects of positivism to circumstances where people were involved. This is because the social world cannot be considered in the same way as the natural world and the social world is not value free therefore it is not possible to provide explanations of a causal nature. Therefore, some changes were made to diminish some of the assumptions outlined in section 4.3.1 above. This led to a derived version of the positivist approach, which became known as the postpositivist philosophy (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017).

Post positivism refers to the approach used that developed out of positivism and challenges the traditional idea about the absolute truth of knowledge (Phillips and Burbules, 2000). In this approach it is accepted that reality is imperfect, and that truth is not an absolute but considered probable. It identifies that researchers cannot be absolutely "positive" when making claims of knowledge about studying the actions or behaviour of humans (Creswell, 2003). The approach allows for observations without experimentation or the formulation of hypotheses to be tested (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017).

Guba (1990) stated that whereas the positivist approach holds the belief that reality is out there to be studied, captured and understood, the postpositivist researcher accepts that reality can only, at best, be approximated.

Phillips and Burbules (2000) outlined the following key points in relation to this research philosophy:

- Absolute truth cannot be found, so the evidence found in research is therefore imperfect and fallible.

- Claims made through research can be either refined or rejected if other claims are more acceptable.

- Data, evidence and rationality support knowledge.

- Research should try to seek true and relevant information which help to a situation or causal relationships.

- Objectivity is an essential aspect of this process and researchers should be mindful of the issues of validity and reliability in using quantitative methods.

Despite the apparent differences to that of the positivist philosophy, the researcher held that the interpretivist approach was the most appropriate for this research study. Thus, the postpositivist approach was rejected.

4.3.2 Realism

Realism is a different philosophical position that aims to provide an account of the nature of scientific practice (Bryman and Bell, 2015). It shares two key features with positivism:

1) a belief that the natural and social sciences could and should apply the same approaches to data collection and explanation, and

2) a commitment to the view that there is an external reality that scientists should direct their attention towards. There are two major forms of realism, empirical realism and critical realism (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Bhaskar (1989) asserts however that empirical realism,

> "*fails to recognise that there are enduring structures and mechanisms underlying and producing observable phenomena and events*" and is therefore "*superficial*" (p.2).

Critical realism is a specific form, which on the other hand, recognises the reality of the natural order and the events and discourses of the social world (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Please refer to Table 4.2 below to compare and contrast the realist perspective in relation to positivist, interpretivist and pragmatic approaches. The realist philosophy was also rejected for this study in favour of adoption of the interpretivist approach.

4.3.3 Pragmatism

The pragmatic research philosophy is one that operates between the positivist and interpretivist paradigms as it largely follows criticism of the positivist view that science discovers an actual reality (Badley, 2003). The pragmatic approach argues that the most important factor determining the epistemology and ontology adopted is the actual research question, as one approach may be more favourable than another in answering that question (Saunders at al., 2019). In some circumstances then, taking a mixed methods approach using qualitative and quantitative methods may be the most appropriate. The researcher might consider the research philosophy adopted to be on a continuum rather on one of opposite sides (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). However, it can be seen that due to the nature of the issues under investigation in this study, i.e. students' experience of transition to PGT and the need to take an in-depth qualitative approach to data collection in order to explore their

experiences, the pragmatic approach was also rejected in favour of an interpretivist approach to the research undertaken in this thesis.

4.3.4 Interpretivism

Interpretivism provides an alternative approach to that of positivism. There can be several terms used in the literature to describe this approach to research such as, phenomenology, constructivism or naturalistic research (Fisher, 2007.) According to Bryman and Bell (2015) the term came from researchers who were critical of the application of the scientific model to the social world. They believed that the subject matter of the social sciences, of people and their institutions is different to that of natural science and hence should be treated differently.

The key effort in adopting the interpretivist approach is to make sense of the subjective world of the human experience (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). This approach requires the researcher to try to understand and interpret what their subjects are thinking or the meaning they are making of the context. It is important to understand the viewpoint of the subject being observed, rather than that of the observer (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017).

Wright (1971) considered the epistemological clash as being between positivism and hermeneutics, a term which refers to the theory and interpretation of human action. The clash arises out of a difference of emphasis between an explanation of human behaviour (as in the positivist approach) and understanding human behaviour (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Interpretivism is concerned with understanding empathetic human actions; the differences in between humans in our roles as human actors (Saunders et al., 2019). Hence, the key principle of the interpretivism is that reality is socially constructed (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998).

The approach has also been called the Constructivist philosophy. Under this approach, theory does not precede research but follows it. It is grounded on the data generated by the research. Hence, when following this paradigm, data are often gathered and analysed in a manner consistent with grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This approach would assume a subjectivist epistemology, a relativist ontology and a naturalist methodology (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017).

In assuming a subjectivist epistemology, the researcher undertakes to make sense of collected data through their own thinking and processing of that data via their interactions with respondents. The researcher constructs knowledge as a result of their own personal experiences of real life within the natural settings investigated (Punch, 2005). It is understood that the researcher and respondents are engaged in interactive processes in which they mix, talk, question, listen, read, write and record research data.

Assuming a relativist ontology, it is understood that the circumstances under investigation can have multiple realities that can be explored and meaning made through the interactions between the researcher and the participants in the research study (Chalmers et al., 2005). In undertaking a naturalist methodology, the researcher collects data via methods such as interviews, discourses, discussions and reflective sessions. Here the researcher may act as a participant observer (Carr and Kemmis, 1986).

4.3.5 Alternative notions of validity, reliability and objectivity in interpretivism

Guba (1981) suggested that for research conducted assuming the interpretivist philosophy, the positivist criteria of internal and external validity, and reliability need to be replaced with four criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity. These include credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability, criteria which are well accepted by scholars in educational research (e.g. Merriam, 1998; Silverman, 2000).

Credibility is used in research to refer to the extent to which data and data analysis are believable, trustworthy or authentic (Guba, 1981). Credibility is the parallel construct to internal validity (Bryman & Bell, 2015). It is important to ensure that the study is carried out in a credible way (Riege, 2003). In order to achieve this, the researcher collected data from several sources in order to triangulate the data. The data sources included interviews conducted with student participants, interviews with key informants and secondary data sources including administrative documents, website information and pre-published survey data.

Dependability, as Guba (1981) explains, refers to the ability to observe the same outcome or finding under similar circumstances. It therefore is equivalent to the notion of reliability (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). However, as interpretivist researchers deal with human behaviour, which is naturally continuously contextually variable and subject to a variety of interpretations of reality, it is not possible to replicate the same results. The researcher can only infer meaning, which is naturally affected by their own personal construction of meaning (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). The interpretation of meaning is dependent on the researcher's ability to ensure that the findings emerging from the data gathered and analysed for the research are true. The dependability of this research was supported by obtaining ethical approval for each phase of the study via the university's ethics committee. A pilot study was conducted prior to the main studies and all semi structured interviews were recorded with permission of the students and key informants. The data that emerged from the interviews were analysed consistently using a thematic analysis approach and verified by the supervisory team.

Confirmability is used by interpretivist researchers rather than those of neutrality and objectivity, aspects which are important to positivist researchers (Guba, 1981). It refers to the extent to which the findings of a research project can be confirmed by others in the field. It is important to check if the interpretation of data is logical and has been conducted in an appropriate manner (Riege, 2003). The overriding goal of confirmability is to ensure that potential biases are at the least minimised, or possibly eliminated, from the results of the data analysed. As Shenton, (2004) explained, that in order to meet this criterion,

> *"steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher"* (p.72).

In this study, confirmability was ensured by outlining the aim and objectives of the research to the participants at the start of the data collection process. Then by asking the respondents to confirm that they were happy that the transcripts of their interviews were a truly reflective account of what was said. The data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach and were subsequently verified by the supervisory team.

Finally, the notion of transferability is used in interpretivist research instead of the notion of external validity used within the positivist paradigm (Guba, 1981; Bryman and Bell, 2015). This aspect represents efforts to ensure that enough contextual data is provided about the research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The transferability of this research thesis was supported by preparing an interview topic guide based on the literature reviewed. A database was constructed based on the transcripts of the data collected which allowed the responses from respondents to be compared.

Interviewing respondents from different cohorts at different stages increases transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As can be seen in this study, two cohorts of students at the PGT level from different years, who had already experienced transition and students at the UG level who were about to experience PGT transition were interviewed.

Gomm et al. (2000) argued that since, interpretivist research is context-specific in terms of respondents and locality, it is impossible to generalize the findings of research which have been conducted following an interpretivist philosophy.

Overall, the interpretivist perspective can be highly relevant in the case of business and management related research, such as in this study, and in areas such as marketing because business situations are complex and unique (Saunders et al., 2019). The interpretivist approach was therefore selected as the most appropriate approach to take in order to meet the aim and objectives of this thesis.

Table 4.2. Main research philosophies compared (adapted from Saunders et al., 2019)

	Positivism	Realism	Interpretivism	Pragmatism
Ontology: *the researcher's view about the nature of reality*	External, objective, independent of social actors.	Is objective and exists independently of human thought, belief or knowledge of their existence (realist). Interpreted through social conditioning.	Socially constructed, subjective, may change, multiple realities.	External, multiple, view is chosen to best help answer research question (s).
Epistemology: *the researcher's view about what is acceptable knowledge*	Only observable phenomena provide credible facts. Focus on causality & law like generalisations, reduce phenomena to simplest elements.	Observable phenomena provide credible facts & data. Insufficient data leads to inaccuracy in sensations or phenomena create sensations open to misinterpretation. Focus on explanations within context(s).	Subjective meanings and social phenomena. Focus on the details of the situation, the reality behind those details, subjective meanings motivating actions.	Either or both observable phenomena and subjective meanings provide acceptable knowledge depending on the research questions. Focus is on practical, applied research which integrates different perspectives to help interpretation of the data.

	Positivism	Realism	Interpretivism	Pragmatism
Axiology: *the researcher's view of role of value in research*	Research is undertaken value free; researcher is independent of the data. An objective stance maintained	Research is value laden; the researcher is biased by own world view, experiences and culture. This will impact on the research	Research is value bound with the researcher part of what is being researched, this cannot be separated and so will be subjective.	Values play a large part in interpreting results; the researcher adopts both objective and subjective viewpoints.
Methodology*: the data collection methods most often used*	Highly structured, large sample sizes, often quantitative but could use qualitative methods.	Methods chosen must fit the subject matter, can use either qualitative or quantitative methods.	Smaller samples, in-depth investigations, qualitative methods.	Mixed or multiple methods, qualitative or qualitative methods.

4.3.6 Justification for adopting an Interpretivist approach

Saunders et al. (2019) suggest that researchers should use the positivist approach if extensive literature exists within the area to be investigated. However, it is unlikely to be suitable when this is not the case, as in this research study. The limitations of positivism in social research according to Fisher (2010) are that, although scientific laws can predict market behaviour, but not the behaviour of individuals. The approach is therefore unsuitable for use in management research where gaining an understanding individual behaviour is crucial to the success of the study. As positivism is only interested in the tangible, it is unsuitable for extensive use on studies which focus on the intangible aspects of human behaviour such as perceptions, feelings, attitudes, beliefs and motivation (Saunders et al., 2019) which are important aspects under investigation in this research.

The interpretivist approach is a qualitative research paradigm which delves into the lived experiences of individuals who are the subjects under investigation (Sanders, 1982) and is therefore, a far more suitable approach for this thesis. As Sanders (1982) explained, this is the case when the subjects of the study cannot lend themselves to easy quantification and where aspects such as perceptions, meanings, feelings, experiences, behaviour, attitudes, beliefs, and value judgments are the topics to be investigated. Saunders et al. (2019) suggested that an interpretivist perspective is most appropriate approach in the case of business and management research of this type and in such fields as marketing.

Saunders et al. (2019) argued that a phenomenological research approach is particularly useful where the subject is new and when previous studies in the area are limited. It is the case that this approach provides more detail on the phenomena under investigation. Denscombe (2014) suggested that the phenomenological approach allows the researcher to delve under the superficial surface of social reality and search into phenomena in depth in order to provide rich descriptions that reflect the complexity of the social world.

Following consideration of the research objectives, the lack of literature pertaining to PGT transition and application of RM approaches, with the focus of the research on students' perceived and actual experiences of transition to PGT study, the researcher contended that the interpretivist approach was more appropriate than the positivist or other paradigmatic stances for this study (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The approach taken for this research was to give voice to the student's expectations, lived experiences and feelings about transition to PGT study in their own right and for their viewpoints to be heard.

4.4 Deductive and inductive research approaches

Deductive theory is possibly the most commonly held view of the relationship between theory and research, where the researcher, on the basis of what is known about a domain and the theoretical considerations within it, construes hypotheses to be subjected to empirical scrutiny (Bryman and Bell, 2015). A deductive approach is referred to as moving from the general theory to observations/findings (Creswell, 2013). This research tends to use a highly structured quantitative methodology in order to facilitate replication and ensure reliability of results (Gill and Johnson, 2010). In order to ensure the principle of scientific rigour, deduction requires that the researcher be independent of what is being observed (Saunders et al., 2019).

Some researchers, however, prefer to take an approach to the relationship between theory and research which is inductive (Bryman and Bell, 2015). An inductive approach is about building a theory from specific observations/findings (Saunders et al., 2019). According to Thomas (2003) the inductive approach is a systematic technique, analysing qualitative data where the analysis is guided by precise objectives. Please refer to Table 4.3 below to see the key differences between detective and inductive approaches to research.

In the design of this qualitative case study, it is important to point out that there was a deductive element to the study, in that the key themes and research questions emerged based on the literature review chapters (Bryman and Bell, 2015). However, this thesis has mainly adopted an inductive approach overall. This is due to the paucity of literature considering issues relating specifically to student transition to PGT and the implementation of RM in HEIs. Just as deduction can often involve an element of induction, the inductive process may also include some deduction, a situation particularly evident in the use of grounded theory (Bryman and Bell, 2015). A modified version of grounded theory has been utilised for this research study.

Table 4.3. Differences between deductive and inductive approaches to research (adapted from Saunders et al. (2019)

Deduction emphasises	Induction emphasises
• Scientific principles	• Acquiring an understanding of the meanings people attach to events
• A move from theory to data	• A close understanding of the research context
• A need to explain the causal relationship between variables	• Collecting qualitative data
• Application of controls to ensure data validity	• Flexible research structure allowing changes of emphasis as the study progresses
• Operationalisation of concepts for clarity of definition	• Recognising the researcher is part of the research process
• Approach which is highly structured	• Not as much concern with the need to generalise findings
• Researcher independent of what is researched	
• Need to select samples of sufficient size to generalise conclusions	

4.5 Applying a modified grounded theory approach

Grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) it is usually thought to be the best example of the inductive approach; however, this assumption is rather simplistic. It is a theory building approach using a combination of induction and deduction (Saunders et al., 2019). In this study, a modified grounded theory strategy will be adopted where the theory to an extent, as Strauss and Corbin (2008) point out, it will be

> "*inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. One does not begin with a theory and then prove it but rather one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to the area is allowed to emerge*" (p317).

Such a strategy is, according to Goulding (2002), very helpful when trying to predict and explain behaviour and can be used to explore a wide range of issues.

Grounded theory approaches can be adopted with either qualitative or quantitative data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Such an approach can, according to Charmaz, (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), offer useful guidelines that support the development of explanatory frameworks showing relationships between concepts. It does not detail data collection techniques but moves the analytic process along to the development, refinement and the interrelation of concepts (Charmaz, 2000). For this study, a qualitative case study approach was proposed and is outlined in the following section on research design.

4.6 Research design

According to Churchill (1999), the research design is a framework for a study which is used to guide the collection and analysis of data. It is like a blueprint that can be followed when completing a research study.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) explained that qualitative and quantitative methods could both be used with any research paradigm. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the researcher adopted an interpretivist and mainly inductive paradigm using a grounded theory approach and qualitative research methods. (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

According to Tesch (2013), the qualitative methodological tradition comprises many different types of research approach, which can be classified into four key categories. These categories include: 1) the characteristics of language; 2) the discovery of regularities; 3) comprehension into the meaning of text and action; and 4) reflection. The research undertaken in this study seeks to provide an in-depth understanding and gain new knowledge of student transition in to the PGT HE environment. This is to be achieved through an investigation of the applicability of relationship approaches and based the perceptions and experiences of students. Hence, the category of qualitative research design indicated by Tesch (2013) which focuses on

> "*comprehension of the meaning of text and action*" (p72-73)

This was considered to be most appropriate category of case study for the current research as it would produce the most valid evidence.

Collis and Hussey (2013) classified different types of research approaches as follows:

- Exploratory research: is conducted to examine a problem or issue when the research is unique or there are few studies which can be referred to for information. As in the case of this research, which considers PGT student transition and the application of RM strategies, an area which has not been researched before.

- Descriptive research: it describes phenomena as they exist; this is common with quantitative and statistical studies. It is not the approach taken within this thesis.

- Predictive research: this is used to generalise from the analysis by predicting certain phenomena based on hypothesised general relationships. This was not the approach adopted for this research.

- Analytical or explanatory research – this approach seeks to analyse and explain reasons behind descriptive research with a focus on 'why' and 'how' questions. Explanatory research focuses on studying a situation in order to explain relationships between variables (Saunders et al., 2019). The approach here was appropriate and therefore adopted for this thesis.

A predominately exploratory research design was felt to be the most appropriate research design to follow for this study, as it considers the development of ideas and insights. Although there are elements of explanatory research approaches apparent, as two of the research questions focus on "how" (please refer to Table 4.4 below). This approach is considered appropriate for turning comprehensive research problems into more definite and precise propositions (Selltiz et al, 1976). It can therefore be understood to be a process of clarifying poorly defined or understood concepts (Churchill, 1999). It can be seen to be the most flexible research design and is often used as the foundation stage for research. It may include literature searches, focus groups or case studies (Selltiz et al, 1976).

The selection of an exploratory and explanatory research design for this thesis relates to its overall aim and objectives, the variables and the context of the research. (Saunders et al., 2019). The research questions for the case study design were formulated based on the key themes identified in the literature review chapters in order to meet the aims and objectives.

Table 4.4. Research questions

Research Questions (RQ) number	Question Topic
RQ1	How do RM factors impact students' motivations and choices when transitioning to PGT study?
RQ2	Which RM factors influence students' expectations, experiences and value perceptions of PGT programmes influenced?
RQ3	Which RM factors induce relationship building and networking activities for PGT students?
RQ4	Which RM factors affect personal changes and positively impact upon students' identities during their PGT studies?
RQ5	How do programme and other support services affect students' experiences and satisfaction during transition?
RQ6	How do university services support ongoing successful relationships and transitions into employment for PGT alumni?

4.6.1 Justification for using a case study research design

This study adopts a qualitative, case study research design using semi-structured interviews because a clearer understanding of the constructs (i.e. student motivations, expectations, activities, identities and experiences during transition) are required and knowledge of the actual research area is rather limited (Zikmund et al., 2000). As Kumar (2014) explains, the focus of qualitative research is to try to comprehend, explain, discover and elucidate contexts, feelings, experiences, expectations, values and beliefs of groups of people.

A case study consists of a strategy for qualitative empirical research which employs an in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003). It is an approach within which a few carefully chosen cases are studied in much detail (Gilbert, 2008). Using case studies are pertinent to organisational and management studies such as this because they provide an understanding of changing aspects present within single situations (Eisenhardt, 1989, p533). As Kumar (2014) posits, this design is of great relevance when the study is focused on,

"*extensively exploring and understanding rather than confirming and quantifying. It provides an overview and in-depth understanding of a case (s), process and interactional dynamics within a unit of study but cannot claim to make any generalisations to a population beyond cases similar to the one studied*" (p.155).

For Yin (2015) the use of multiple sources of information are important to include in the construction of a case study. A variety of sources of data can allow the researcher to address a broad range of issues and can provide convincing and accurate conclusions (Yin, 2015).

Case study research is not limited to the study of a single case, as multiple case designs have become increasingly used in business and management research. These are largely undertaken in order to compare and contrast cases and often include a longitudinal element (Bryman and Bell, 2015). In this thesis, the overall study was based upon a single university however, three cohorts of students from Business and Management programmes were used as three separate cases, the findings from which could then be compared and contrasted. The three cases included two mixed year groups of Business and Management postgraduate students, who had recently experienced transition to PGT study, and a third case consisting of mixed cohort of undergraduate Business and Management students who were about to experience transition to a PGT programme. Cross sectional research rather than a longitudinal design was selected as the preferred approach because the researcher wanted to collect data from students based on their expectations and experiences from a "snapshot" in time (Saunders et al., 2019). The data for the study was collected in two phases with three groups of students. Two groups were interviewed in October 2017 and the third group were interviewed in October 2018. Please refer to Table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5. Phases of the study

	Phase 1 – October 2017		Phase 2 - October 2018
Location	X University meeting room	X University meeting room	X university meeting room
Sample	17 PGT students	13 Final year UG students	14 PGT students & 2 key university staff
Data/Method	Qualitative interviews + PTES secondary data	Qualitative interviews	Qualitative interviews + PTES secondary data

4.7 Justification for using qualitative interviews

The key aspect of interviews is that there are contextually bound (Fontana and Frey, 2003) as interviewing has traditionally been destined in the concept of neutrality. In exploratory and explanatory studies, in depth and semi structured interviews can be used, according to Robson (2002), in order to discover what is happening and to find new insights. Qualitative research has often been used develop the domain of PGT student transitions and has routinely used interviewing techniques, alongside documentary sources (e.g. Hesketh and Knight, 1999; Tobbell et al., 2008; Stuart et al., 2009; Tobbell et al., 2010; House, 2010; Taylor and House, 2010; Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013 a and b; Evans et al, 2017).

An alternative approach could have been to use focus groups for data collection in this research instead. However, it was felt that this approach would not be suitable because of the potential to inhibit the responses of the respondents in a group situation. Individuals may not wish to discuss their particular perceptions, expectations or identities with regard to their new status as PGT students or any concerns they may have in this regard in front of other students. Another concern is that focus groups can become overly dominated by group members with very strongly held views (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). Therefore, focus groups were not deemed to be a suitable method to collect qualitative information for the purposes of this research.

According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998), interviews are a powerful method of data collection. They provide one to one interaction between the researchers and the individuals within the study. This offers both parties the opportunity to ask for clarification if an answer is vague, or if a question is unclear. Semi structured interviews allow the researcher to probe more deeply for answers (Saunders et al., 2019). However, there are some drawbacks and disadvantages that need to be considered. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) consider that interviews may be time consuming and expensive to conduct and in the analysis of the data obtained. One of the major disadvantages of the method is related to reliability and the risk of interviewer bias through their effects on interactions with respondents (Silverman, 2007). Reliability relates to the consistency of the research findings. Consideration had to be given to how the interviews were conducted, through data gathering, recording, coding and interpretation. Bias can unwittingly occur through the researcher's mannerisms, gestures or verbal feedback, so this had to be recognised. It is also possible to demonstrate bias in the way in which the respondents' responses are interpreted (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015).

The issue of validity, according to Hammersley (1990) is,

> "*the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers*" (p.57),

Criteria for assessing validity may include the impact of the researcher on the setting, the researcher's values and the status of a respondent's account (Silverman, 2010). Please refer to section 4.8.5 below for an account of the interviews the interviews were conducted and how issues of bias were overcome in this research.

4.8 Ethical approval

Ethical approval was sought prior to commencement of each stage of the research, in line with the requirements of the university's ethical standards committee (please see the appendix 10 for an example of the ethical approval form used). Consent forms were provided at the time of the interviews to seek the student respondents' consent for the interviews to be recorded. The participants were also informed that they would be able to withdraw from the study at any point in time and that any data they provided would be anonymised. In this research design, the student participants interviewed in the first stage of data collection were not the same as the participants used in the second phase. Please refer to the appendices 5 – 8 for examples of the sign-up sheet, the emails sent to PGT and UG students and the consent forms provided.

4.8.1 Pilot testing

Prior to the main data collection phases, using semi structured interviews, an initial research topic guide was developed based on the literature reviews from Chapters 2 and 3. A pilot study was conducted which allowed for checking the main data collection instrument and the methodology in order there were no issues (Yin, 2015). This approach allowed the researcher to test out different styles of questioning (Silverman, 2014). The first topic guide (as the main research instrument) was trialled with 4 PGT and UG students and subsequent revisions were made to ease student understanding of the questions and to re-order the questions. Please refer to the appendix 3 for an example of the revised topic guide. Appendix 4 provides a copy of the topic guide used with the third group of PGT respondents. It contains additional questions for this group of students.

4.8.2 Sampling approach

According to Bryman and Bell (2015) discussions about sampling in qualitative research tends consider the use of purposive sampling, a non-probability form of sampling. The goal of purposive sampling is to sample respondents in a strategic manner so that the units selected for the sample (in this case students) were chosen on the basis of their direct reference to the research questions being

asked. Therefore, the research questions provided a guide as to which respondents should be selected.

A form of purposive sampling is known as theoretical sampling was used, an approach advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in the context of grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained that,

> *"theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them"* (p.45).

The process of collecting the data is therefore controlled by the emerging theory; it is an ongoing process rather than a single stage. According to Charmaz (2000), theoretical sampling is a fundamental property of grounded theory and concerns the refinement of theoretical categories that appear in the course of analysing collected data, rather than enhancing sample size.

Taking a modified grounded theory-based approach in this thesis, the researcher carried on collecting data from the student participants until theoretical saturation had been achieved (Bryman and Bell, 2015). It meant that successive interviews formed the basis of a category and confirmed its importance, therefore there was no requirement to continue with data collection in relation to that specific category (or group of categories). The researcher was able to move forward with these categories, subsequently collecting data in relation to the research questions. As Charmaz (2000) explained, if new data does not provide any further dimensions to the theoretical categories, then the categories are seen to be saturated and no further new insights are provided.

In total some forty-four semi structured interviews were carried out with three groups of student participants in two phases, until the data saturation point was reached. In addition, a further two professional discussions were carried out with key informants from the university.

4.8.3 Research location

The research was undertaken at X University, located in Birmingham, the second largest city in the UK. X University is one of the smaller UK HE institutions, based in the city centre. In recent years the university has seen an increase in the total number of its student body, not least following the removal of the student number controls, however the total student population remains at approximately 15,000, at the lower end when compared with the student body at other UK HEIs. Students were invited to attend the interviews in a bookable meeting room not assigned to a staff member.

4.8.4 Access to the student respondents

Access to the student participants for each phase of the research was negotiated by the researcher. This was relatively straightforward as the researcher is employed by the university where the research study was conducted. The PGT student participants came from a variety of Business and Management related taught master's programmes. The undergraduate respondents were similarly from a variety of Business and Management programmes. Contact with student respondents was initiated by the researcher attending a variety of PGT and undergraduate classes, with the permission of their tutors, and asking all the students in class whether they would be willing to participate in the study. A sign-up sheet was handed around the class for students to provide their contact details. A purposive sample of the students that provided their contact details was then emailed individually by the researcher to invite them to an interview and their agreement sought as to suitable dates, a meeting room and interview protocols.

4.8.5 Undertaking the qualitative interviews

Semi structured interviews were conducted with in two phases using two sample groups of students. In phase 1, a group of 17 PGT students and a second group of 13 undergraduate students were selected. In phase 2, one group of 14 PGT students were interviewed in total. Please see appendix 2 for further details of all the participants. All student names have been anonymised in that their names have been replaced with initials that will not allow them to be specifically identified.

The semi structured interviews typically lasted between 60 - 90 minutes and were electronically recorded, with the respondents' permission, alongside detailed notes taken by the researcher in case of technology failure. Following each interview, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. (Please see appendix 9 for an example of a transcript). All interviews were conducted face to face with the exception of one, which was conducted over the telephone. This was the only way in which the researcher could gain access to the individual, as he was overseas at that time. Information about where and when the interviews took place can be seen above in Table 4.5.

A copy of the topic guide used in phase 1 of the interviews can be found at appendix 3. This topic guide was based on the literature reviewed in chapters 2 and 3 and was designed to support answers to the research questions outlined in Table 4.4. The interviews were designed to explore the student participants' understanding of the problems they perceived they would face when transitioning to PGT study (in the case of current final year undergraduates) or their actual lived experience of transition to PGT study (in the case of current PGT students). All groups of students were asked the same questions regardless of the fact they were in the undergraduate or postgraduate groups.

A copy of the second topic guide can be found at appendix 4. This topic guide was used in phase 2 with a second group of PGT students who had recently transitioned into PGT study. This topic guide was also based on the literature reviewed in chapters 2 and 3 but included some additional questions that were not asked of the students who participated in phase 1 of the study but were considered important areas relating to PGT transition that needed to be explored. The additional topic areas included the following: location issues, assessment, group work, feedback, PGT learning environment, facilities and social spaces, post PGT careers support and post PGT experiences.

Care was taken to ensure that the questions were phrased clearly, to avoid jargon and in order that the student respondents could understand them (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). The questions were asked in a neutral tone of voice (Saunders et al., 2019). Use was made of open questions in order to avoid bias which were followed up with probing questions in order to produce a fuller account (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Comments and non-verbal gestures on the part of the interviewer were avoided and neutral responses were given to the interviewees' questions, also in order to prevent bias (Robson, 2002).

4.8.6 Secondary data

In this study, use was made of secondary data to include both qualitative and quantitative elements in order to triangulate the study. Triangulation is the process of gathering data from multiple sources relevant to the studied phenomenon (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This process included collecting documentary data such as administrative records and documents, website materials and survey based secondary data such as the results from the annual Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES). Secondary data were used to identify student backgrounds and to report their overall satisfaction with the quality of their PGT Business programmes at the end of their studies.

4.8.7 Discussions with key university informants

Discussions about this research were held with two key informants from the university's Marketing department and the Business School Programme office. The justification for holding these discussions was to gain further insights from key staff involved with the university's plans, processes and procedures with regard to issues of student transition to PGT study, recruitment and retention of PGT students, PGT induction and the student experience. No interview topic guides were used as the subject matter under discussion was different for each party and no audio recordings were made. Extensive notes were taken by the researcher, however. The staff involved were able to provide useful information about issues that affected the student transition experience which included, PGT student recruitment, establishing early contact and university use of CRM, induction into PGT programmes and positioning the university's programme offerings.

4.9 Qualitative analysis

Coding is one of the key processes in grounded theory. This involves data being broken down into component parts which are then named. This process begins very soon after the collection of the initial data (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The researcher codes the emerging data whilst it is collected, unlike quantitative research approaches in which the researcher requires the data to fit into preconceived standardized codes (Charmaz, 2000). The researcher's interpretations of the data will shape the emerging codes. As Charmaz (2000) clarifies, codes work as a shorthand way to sort, separate out, assemble and organise data.

Strauss and Corbin (2008) describe the three types of coding practice: open, axial and selective coding. Open coding is the way in which, data are broken down, compared, examined and categorised. In this way the production of concepts is achieved which allows them to be grouped into categories. Axial coding allows for connections between categories to be made. This is achieved by linking codes to contexts, patterns and causes. A category may subsume two or more concepts but is at a higher level of abstraction than concepts (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Selective coding is the process of selecting the core category, the central or pivotal issue to around which all the other categories are connected. The process used for this research will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter on data analysis and findings.

4.10 Chapter summary

To summarise this methodology chapter, on the basis of the reasoning and justifications provided, the adoption of a grounded theory based, inductively derived, qualitative research methodology, was proposed using a case study approach. This was deemed to be the most appropriate method to conduct this investigation and produce valid evidence to meet the research aim and objectives of this thesis. In total 44 semi structured interviews were conducted with two groups of postgraduate and one group of final year undergraduate students, together with discussions with 2 key informants from the university and supplemented with documentary sources of information. The data from these sources were collected and analysed and the results are reported in the next chapter.

Chapter 5. Data Analysis and Findings

5.0 Introduction

As outlined in the previous chapter, this study adopts an interpretivist philosophical stance, an inductive approach, and employs a qualitative methodology in order to examine the motivations, expectations and experiences of students, both prior to their transition to PG study, and at the early stages of their PGT studies, and how these could be affected by a variety of factors.

In order to provide answers to the research questions (see Table 4.4), an exploratory research design was devised, comprising three separate studies based within a single university setting. A total of 44 face to face interviews in total were conducted. The interviews were conducted until the point of theoretical saturation was reached, where no further new ideas or explanations were forthcoming from the respondents. Each interview lasted between 60 - 90 minutes and was electronically recorded with the permission of the respondent.

The interview data obtained from the three cases in this thesis were then transcribed and analysed using a four-stage thematic analysis coding process (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Thematic analysis is a method used to identify, analyse and report patterns (or themes) within data. It organizes and describes the data set in (rich) detail (Boyatzis, 1998). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the thematic analysis of responses from surveys or transcribed interviews can explore the context of teaching and learning in a depth that quantitative analysis lacks, whilst allowing for flexibility and interpretation when analysing the data. However, they explain that much care should be given to the transparency of the method, in order to ensure confidence in the findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

After transcription of recordings of the interviews, the data were organised and separated. Disassembling the data involved taking the data apart to create meaningful groupings. This was achieved through coding the data. Coding, in qualitative research, is the process whereby raw data are can be gradually transformed into usable data by identifying themes, concepts, or ideas that link to each other. (Austin and Sutton, 2014).

Kuper et al (2008) consider that,

> "*qualitative data analysis is largely inductive, allowing meaning to emerge from the data, rather than the more deductive, hypothesis centred approach favoured by quantitative researchers*."

The meaning that "emerges from the data" tends to be "first seen" as the data is separated and coded (Kuper et al., 2008).

For each study, open codes were assigned to the transcripts initially, followed by a thorough re-read which led to additional open codes being added with sub codes (axial codes). The codes were then allocated to more general, aggregated themes (category codes) in order to link the data together. Please see Table 5.1, which presents the analytical strategy underpinning the data analysis approach taken. The coding process was initially undertaken via a paper-based exercise but then following re-reading and in some cases, re-coding, that data were transferred and coded using NVivo version 12 software.

Table 5.1. Data Analysis Strategy

Analytical strategy	Study approach
Research design	• Devise questions based on the gaps in the literature • Group questions under main headings • Split into main and sub questions
Data collection	• Arrange interviews with students • Conduct and record interviews • Transcribe interviews • Check through and refine transcripts
Data display	• Transcript data aligned under headings both by hand and using NVivo software
Coding analysis	• Coding undertaken using open and axial codes, finally themes are aggregated

5.1 Findings: Study 1

This study reports the findings from the in-depth, qualitative, semi structured interviews conducted with a purposive sample of 17 respondents in October 2017. Please refer to Appendix 2 for details of the individual anonymised participants. All respondents who participated in this study were postgraduate students who had recently experienced the transition to PGT Business programmes at X University. Please refer to Appendix 3 for the interview topic guide used for this study. Table 5.2 below outlines the key category codes, second order themes and first order concepts that emerged from the interviews.

Table 5.2. Summary of themes from study 1 data

	Category codes	Transition Phase	Second order themes	First order concepts
1.	**Personal motivations and influences affecting choices**	Moving in Phase (Pre-transition)	A. Interest in subject area	1. Personal interest 2. Self-development
			B. Choice of university	3. Specialism 4. University reputation (rankings & accreditation) 5. Previous experience of the university 6. Family/peer/tutor influences 7. Open days & applications/Information quality
			C. Choice of programme	8. Costs & financing PGT studies 9. Building on existing knowledge 10. Building on work experience
2.	**Expectations, experiences & value of PGT studies**	Moving Through Phase (Situation)	D. Preparation for & expectations of PGT study	1. Feelings about PGT 2. Importance of preparation 3. Challenges of PGT study
			E. Programme experiences & activities	4. Learning activity 5. Self-direction & autonomy
			F. Adding value	6. Skills and knowledge development 7. Future employability 8. Differentiation

	Category codes	Transition Phase	Second order themes	First order concepts
3.	**Relationship building approaches**	Moving Through Phase (Support)	G. Networking	1. Socialisation processes 2. Learning community
			H. Events	3. Social events 4. Culture & language
4.	**Identity and personal changes**	Moving Through Phase (Self)	I. Identity changes	1. Personal & professional identity 2. Self-confidence & self esteem
5.	**Programme organisation and support services**	Moving Through Phase (Support)	J. Learner support	1. Programme organisation 2. Dedicated office support 3. Library/LDC 4. Careers support 5. Tutor support
6.	**Post university services**	Moving out Phase (Graduation)	K. Post-PGT services	1. Alumni services

5.1.1 Moving in (pre-transition) phase - Personal motivations and influences affecting choices

Based on the review of the transition literature outlined in Chapter 2, section 2.4, this first section of the study seeks to uncover the RM factors that affect the personal motivations and influences on choices of students prior to undertaking transition to PGT study, in the pre-transition, "moving in" phase. This first overarching aggregated category code groups together the themes (A, B and C) which are underpinned by first order concepts which emerged from interviews with the PGT students.

5.1.1.1 Interest in subject area (Theme A)

This theme has a major influence on the personal motivations and choices that students make prior to commencing the transition process into PGT studies. The first order concepts, grouped together under this second category theme, include: Personal interest, Self-development and Specialism.

A1. Personal interest

Under this theme, respondents expressed their particular personal interests that motivated them to pursue a master's qualification in a subject area. This was usually because they had become interested in business related areas after studying other subjects at bachelors' level. Good examples of this include the following two vignettes:

> Respondent SO (Home student) described that how he felt about doing his bachelor's degree and why he became interested in doing a business-related master's, "*I couldn't see myself doing this long term… while looking into the business side and how everything works … it seems like that's something I could see myself doing. That's what motivated me to come to this line… to transition to a business career*".
>
> Respondent UZ (Home student) also wanted to pursue a different path due to his own personal interests, "*because I was interested in business, more than the computing side of things, even though I had studied Computer Science*".

It is important that students that students have the opportunity to change subjects at PGT level from those studied at UG level. These students recognised the usefulness of undertaking business programmes which would fit with their future career choices and further development. So called 'conversion' programmes can allow students without bachelor's degree in business to 'convert' to a chosen business subject area at PGT level.

A2. Self-development

This concept explains that a few respondents are motivated to change subject topic at PGT level as part of a process of self-development. The two examples below are typical.

> Respondent RA (Overseas student) explained that doing a PG programme was for her "*a kind of self-development and improves my job prospects*".
>
> In addition, Respondent LI (Local home student) stated that," *I was interested in business management…and I wanted something more applicable to everyday life. So that was for my self-development*".

It seems that personal development can be an important motivational factor for those undertaking PGT programmes. In the examples given, the business PGT programmes were seen as providing this development and greater job opportunities.

A3. Specialism

A number of respondents said that they particularly wanted to study a specific specialist PGT Business subject and that this was why they were attracted to and had chosen the university. Some respondents wanted a specific programme not offered by many other HE institutions.

> "The *main reason I chose the uni was because of Strategy and International Business, not many universities offer that, especially in the UK.*" Respondent CA (EU student).
>
> Respondent YP (Overseas student) also had a particular desire to study a certain specialist area, as she explains, *"I wanted to study International Business and X has this subject, so I chose it"*.
>
> Respondent NA (EU student) explained that she wanted a programme that was a bit different, "*I wanted something practice oriented and not just this learning and reproducing things because I was so fed up of that*".

The quote from Respondent NA above seems to link to the slogan on the Business School's website that states, "We do business, we don't just talk about it". The respondent expressed this practical element of the programme as the main reason for her choice of university. The range of subjects offered by the HEI were felt to be attractive.

5.1.1.2 Choice of university (Theme B)

The analysis of data under this 2nd order theme considers the key motivational factors (which are grouped together as first order concepts) that impacted on students' choices of which university within which to undertake their PGT studies. These concepts include, Reputation, Previous experience of the university, Family, peer and tutor influences, Open Days and information.

B4. University reputation (rankings and accreditation)

This first order concept factors heavily in the respondents' choice of university and their expressed motivations and choices for choosing the university for their PGT studies.

Based on feedback from the respondents in this study, the reputation of the university and how it is ranked and accredited has a strong bearing on their choice of university for PGT study.

> Respondent CH (EU student) explained that the motivation for her choice of university was informed by its reputation," *reputation, exactly, of X, added to my decision*".
>
> For Respondent SO (Home student), rankings informed his choice in particular, "*I started looking at those FT rankings, obviously they are in the top 100 in the world and in the Eduniversal rankings as well, they're ranking like four palms as one of the top universities*".
>
> In some cases, it was both the "*FT rankings and triple accreditation*" Respondent ET (Overseas student).

The triple accreditation referred to above includes AACSB, EQUIS and AMBA accreditations. The Business School is one of only 1% of institutions worldwide to hold this ranking. For some students this is clearly a very important factor affecting their choice of institution.

The "brand" of the university also be seen to be a signal of quality for students that they want to be associated with.

> As MG (Home student) explained, his choice was strongly informed by brand, "*I wanted the name behind me*".

Another important benefit of branding for universities is the possibility for satisfied and committed students to become influencers or brand ambassadors for the university.

> Respondent YP (Overseas student) suggested that the fame of the university and word of mouth influence about it helped to influence her choice by stating, "*This Business School is very famous and I hear it from my friends, they think this university is better than other places*".

Satisfied students are likely to engage in extensive word of mouth communication, thereby acting as promotional agents on behalf of the service provider. For universities, WOM is shown to be a powerful form of marketing communication.

> For Respondent LI (Local home student) it was the reputation for teaching that stood out, "it's *a modern-day university that seems to offer quite a lot through teaching, it has a good reputation*".

The respondent above mentioned the importance teaching quality had in influencing his choice of university, which is unsurprising given that X university had been ranked in the Gold category under the UK's Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). Interestingly, no students specifically mentioned the importance of academic research in influencing their motivation to study at the university. However, it is noted that research and the Research Excellence Framework (REF) have an impact on the university's reputation and its rankings.

B5. Previous experience of the university

This concept was important for those students who had studied at the university before, as their familiarity with the university and past satisfaction with it had influenced their choice to do PGT studies there.

> Respondent AM (EU student) was satisfied with her previous experience with the university and stated, "*I decided that I would be applying for master's, X was my first choice with that because I had a very positive experience with the university*".
>
> Respondent MG (Home student), felt that, "*building on familiar steppingstones, which is great and you're able to increase that foundation rather than building on completely separate foundations.*"

Those students who previously had satisfactory experiences with the university at UG level are most likely to remain committed and loyal to the HEI and are willing to return for their PGT studies.

B6. Family, peer and tutor influences

This concept is important to include, as for some students, the opinions of family and friends or tutors are prime motivators in terms of influencing their choice of university.

> An overseas respondent explained how her motivations for choosing to come to X had been influenced by her friends and tutors, "*I was thinking about which uni to go to because I definitely wanted a PG degree and was asking friends and my lecturers at Y. At that time, I was going to stay in Y …my lecturer in Y... I was asking him should I stay at Y or go to X? He told me he had met some colleagues at X and that was the main reason that encouraged me to come here*" Respondent YU (Overseas student).
>
> MI, (Overseas student), explained her choice was informed by a friend who had prior knowledge of the university," *I knew (the university) is good because one of my classmates, she studied here before and she just told me about the university*".
>
> A UK based respondent said that family members influenced his choice, "*my auntie and uncle who've both been to university, they recommended me to go to X*" Respondent UZ (Home student).

The word-of-mouth recommendations of family, peers, alumni, and tutors at other institutions are important. These groups of people can be important influencers of potential students' opinions and actions with regard to their choice of university.

B7. Open Days, applications and information

The respondents said that the events like Open Days and meetings with admissions staff and others supported their decision by providing information about PGT study and supported the application process to come to the university.

Respondent CH (EU student) reported, *"I came to the Open Day and the minute I left I had decided I would apply for this university"*.

Respondent LI (Local home student) explained that, "*I felt like (the university) provided me with what I needed to know and I spoke to the representatives of the course and felt quite confident with what they told me. I came to an Open Day and looked at the facilities, the uni, you know…I feel like the individual has to have the motivation to join as well"*.

Visiting the university at Open Day gives students a good "feel" for the campus and the opportunity to speak to relevant staff about PGT programmes. Both tutors and admissions staff can play an important role in influencing students' decisions and building relationships with students at an early stage. The quality of timely and up to date, detailed information about the programme at the university can be critical in informing students about their choice. Information availability on the website, through emails or even videos seems to be particularly important but also attendance at fairs, events and meetings with the agents or others can affect potential students' choices.

The majority of students used the university's website to access details about the university's programmes.

"I did some research online first because I knew I wanted a more general study course" Respondent JU (EU student.

Some students thought it was easy to find the appropriate information online, "*the actual navigation was relatively straight forward because as soon as you type in 'Masters at X', you get a flurry of results"* Respondent MG (Home student).

However, some students were a little disappointed with the lack of specific information available about the PGT programmes which they wanted to use to prepare for their studies.

> *" I wanted to study in the UK and did tons of research on the internet …but when I was looking at the courses there were no exact descriptions of ... like the module descriptions. That would be very interesting to have in advance"* Respondent NA, (EU student).

The point made about the lack of module information was an oft mentioned complaint about the programmes. Many students reported that they wanted to prior sight of the specific modules they would be studying because they wanted to prepare thoroughly before commencing their studies.

Use of early email contact with students was also appreciated and can be used as a way to establish early relationships with students.

> Respondent MI (Overseas student) said, *"I think X did this very well because they email …they pay more attention to the details they send to us early on than others*".

The use of video offers a rather different approach, but it can also provide students with an insight into PGT programmes and university life. This could be very beneficial for those overseas students unable to visit the campus for Open Days.

> *"I mean like I did see some YouTube videos, but these were like from some years ago I think."* Respondent RA (Overseas student). This was the only example in this case study of a student using accessing old videos to find out information about the HEI.

Overseas recruitment fairs can also be a useful means for students to find out more about the university and its programmes.

> Respondent VI (EU student) attended an overseas recruitment fair and explained, "*I talked at a fair in Cologne to one of the (university) promotors maybe… it was the first time I got in touch with (the university) itself and talked to someone in depth… And then the course homepage internet research after that".* He went on to explain further, "*I then visited X in February and everything was well structured".*

The importance of visiting the HEI was mentioned as being helpful in the provision of important information and establishing early links with a university.

The importance of agents, as a source of information on PGT programmes for overseas students, seems to be critical in supporting students' choices too.

> Respondent YU (Overseas student) found this source of information to be important for her, "*The thing, especially with Chinese international students, they search for uni through the agents. And I think that is the main resource".*

Overall, the provision of up to date, detailed and specific promotional information about programmes and modules are critically important in assisting student choice. It would seem that HEI webpages need to be up to date and informative, which is important because a website is seen as a 'hygiene factor' for all universities.

5.1.1.3 Choice of PG programme (Theme C)

This second order theme considers the key factors involved with students' choices for studying a particular Business PGT programme at university. The first order codes are grouped under this theme are: Costs and financing PGT studies, building on existing knowledge and building on previous work experience.

C8. Costs and financing PGT studies

The costs associated with a programme are an important influence on students' choices and motivations to transition to PGT study. The costs can either be in the form of fees charged by the university for its PGT programmes, or the cost of living associated with living in Birmingham or elsewhere in the UK. Good examples of these views are provided by the respondents below. The possibility of being awarded a scholarship can also influence choice of PGT programme.

> Respondent NA (EU student), said that it was the cost of living associated with going to London that informed her decision, "*I thought of London, but I was like, okay, London is really, really expensive so I went for Birmingham*".
>
> Respondent SO (Home student), explained that he had looked elsewhere in the UK first too but settled on X, "*Because there were a lot of other courses, similar programmes in other universities which were about triple the fees*".

Another factor is the offer of scholarships to students that persuade them to take up a PGT programme.

> Respondent UZ (Home student) explained he took up a place on X's PGT programme because he was awarded a scholarship, "*I was offered a scholarship which I haven't received just yet*".

Most of the student respondents were either self-financing their studies or their parents were supporting them and paying their fees. Only a few had taken out a PGT student loan to finance their studies and even fewer had also received a scholarship.

> Respondent LI (Local home student) explained that, "I *am on a student loan, it was easy to arrange"*.

At the time these interviews were conducted, student loans for PGT programmes were only newly introduced and the majority of students either self-financed their studies or their parents paid for the programme. It seemed that the introduction of student loans and the relative ease of the application process would encourage more students to take up PGT studies.

These factors are important influencers on students' choice of PGT programme and university. The cost of living is cheaper in Birmingham in comparison to London and lower PGT fees are attractive.

C9. Building on existing knowledge

This first order concept explains that some students are motivated by the need to capitalise on and further develop the knowledge gained from their bachelor's degree. The students either felt they needed to focus on a more specific area perhaps via a conversion type postgraduate programme, having undertaken a broad-based bachelor's degree or one that was unrelated to Business.

> Respondent VI (EU student) clarified that he required more specific knowledge of an area as he had a General Management undergraduate degree, "*the basics were covered from every part in my BSc, basically Marketing, HR, Finance, so everything but only a little bit. I want my master's to be more specialised*".
>
> Respondent YU (Overseas student) had an International Business bachelor's degree and also wanted more specific knowledge. She said," *when I was at Y there was the subject of International Marketing and I found the content quite intriguing. So, I think I will go deeper into this area".*

However, some others felt the opposite, that their bachelor's degrees were too focussed, and they needed broader based subject knowledge. Some good examples of this are from the following respondents.

> Respondent AM (EU student) had completed a Marketing undergraduate degree and felt she now needed a broader subject base, "*I decided I want to master's because … I want to broaden my knowledge because my course was very specialised. I needed something broader to widen my perspectives".*
>
> Respondent HI (EU student) agreed because she had studied a subject unrelated to Business for her undergraduate degree, "wanted *to go more in depth in some business subjects".*

It seems that a broad range of both general and more specialist PGT programmes, including conversion programmes are necessary to attract students to choose the university. HEIs should consider their PGT qualifications as entry points into various professions and provide options for students to convert from unrelated first degrees.

C10. Building on previous work experience

This concept describes the motivation for a few students to build on their work-based experience by doing a master's level programme. Students in this case study felt this was an important factor influencing their motivation to start PGT study but who were ineligible to qualify for an MBA programme as they lacked the requisite work experience at the appropriate level for that qualification.

> Respondent UZ (Home student) describes this requirement in relation to his recent work experience in China, *"I really enjoyed the working experience in China and because I was living there for a while, …I was networking, and I made some good connections for some business ideas and that sort of motivated me to come back and do a master's to build on this experience".*
>
> Another respondent had spoken with her manager and others at work prior to coming to university, *"I was discussing it with my manager and other senior members of the company, and they suggested doing a marketing master's, for the future of my career. They thought I had the ability to do that"* Respondent CH (EU student).

Building on existing work experience can be an important factor that motivates students to choose a particular university programme in terms of its perceived value.

5.1.2 Moving through transition (situation) phase - Expectations, experiences and value of PG studies

Based on the review of the transition literature considered in Chapter 2, section 2.5, this section of the case study seeks to explore the expectations and experiences of students in the "moving through" situational phase of transition to PGT studies. Under the general, aggregated code, of expectations and experiences of PGT study links together several main themes (D, E and F) together with underpinning groups of first order concepts, explores PG students' expectations, experiences and perceptions of value.

5.1.2.1 Preparing for and expectations of PGT study (Theme D)

The second order theme D, groups together first order concepts identified through the semi structured interviews, to include: Feelings about PG study, Importance of preparation and Challenges of PGT study.

D1. Feelings about PGT study

Respondents generally reported positive feelings towards their transition to PGT study. These feelings were reported as having a sense of pride, optimism, excitement, positivity and happiness.

> Respondent CH (EU student) explained that," first *of all it makes me feel proud with myself to do postgraduate degree"*
>
> Respondent HI (EU student) said that when she joined the programme "*at the time I was quite excited*".
>
> Respondent JU (EU student) explained that she felt "*super happy to come here and everything was totally fine from the beginning".*

However, not all students were as positive. Some reported rather mixed feelings about the transition process.

> Respondent AM (EU student) for example, said she had mixed feelings about returning to the university after her UG degree, "*I was really excited to be back here even though my friends are not with me anymore, which makes me feel a bit sad".*
>
> Respondent MG (Home student) also expressed rather mixed feelings, "*Excited was definitely one of them. Nervous, slightly, as I didn't know anyone on the course and there's always that sense of foreboding when you're going into something like that".*

Some students expressed negative feelings too. These feelings included fear, being overwhelmed, anxiety, apprehension or nervousness about the transition process. The following quotations are fairly typical expressions of these feelings.

> Respondent LI (Local home student) explained that, "*I felt nervous, especially before I started... it was quite intimidating... it's, you know, a big thing and a big change but once I got over it, I started to feel more confident*".
>
> Respondent RA (Overseas student) said that at the start of the programme she was "*a bit scared because it was a lot to take in. There were so many concepts I did not understand. And I just felt a bit overwhelmed I would say".*

The feelings of students' undertaking PGT programmes ranged from positive and certain, to unsure and fearful. Others experienced rather mixed feelings. These feelings need to be acknowledged and appropriate services put in place for those students experiencing any anxiety or other difficulties to avoid students leaving the programme and feeling dissatisfied with the service provided.

D2. Importance of preparation

The student respondents expressed how they felt it was important to be properly prepared when transitioning into PGT study. Several students felt that going straight into PGT study from their UG studies was helpful because they were in a "ready to learn mindset".

> "*I guess I was more prepared than most people because I just didn't get out of that study mode*" Respondent JU (EU student).
>
> Respondent LI (Local home student) agreed with this view stating,*" I was as ready as I could be, I…chose to do post graduate degree after my undergraduate because I felt it would be the most kind of ready time to do it."*

This was not a universally held view however, some felt having a gap between completion of an undergraduate degree and commencing PGT studies was beneficial.

> Respondent UZ (Home student) said he benefited from a break between UG and PGT study. *"I think I was well prepared. I think the gap year had done me some good and I gained some good experience"*.

It is important that students are supported in their preparation for PGT study, therefore early links and relationships established with them will be beneficial.

D3. Challenges of PGT study

Some students reported that they felt that transitioning to PGT study was quite a challenge both academically and culturally, however they were overwhelmingly positive in terms of being able to take on this challenge and to be successful in achieving the qualification. Some good examples are from the following respondents.

> Respondent HI (EU student) found the PGT programme she was doing difficult, *"academically it is definitely a challenge".*
>
> Respondent XX (Overseas student) said, "*I'm quite committed to this because I want it to be exciting every day, facing new and different challenges on a daily basis. I am willing to take on more challenges and I have always been motivated but I think I am even more motivated".*

The students knew that entering a PGT programme would be academically challenging and sometimes difficult, but they generally relished the challenge and felt motivated to succeed.

For overseas students who are adapting to the challenge of a new educational environment the challenge can be greater. Naturally, this change can be rather daunting for them, as the teaching approaches used in their home country can be very different from that in the UK and this factor should not be underestimated.

5.1.2.2 Programme experiences and activities (Theme E)

The second order theme E draws together the first order concepts which include: Learning activity and Self direction and autonomy.

E4. Learning activity

This key theme considers the students' early experiences related to their PGT learning activities. The respondents provide details of the activities they engaged in, some of the difficulties encountered and how they felt about them.

> Respondent SO (Home student) said that, "*the way the course is structured it is, so far, easy to pick up...as long as you are attending the lectures and following the material, even for someone like me, it is easy*".
>
> Respondent NA (EU student) thought the programme was very practical in orientation," *a lot of practical oriented things, like case studies … are happening. And also, I was expecting a small group which we have and I feel the lecturers really support us, it's good*".
>
> Some overseas students commented on the differences in teaching style with what they had been previously used to, Respondent YP (Overseas student) commented that, "*I think it's different from… China, is what the teachers say there, we write it down*". For some students this different approach to teaching and can be difficult to adjust to.

Some overseas students found that the teaching style in the UK was rather different to what they had experienced in their home countries which was rather more didactic in approach. This change in approach needs to be acknowledged and overseas students perhaps given more time to adapt to it.

Overall, the student respondents reported overall satisfaction with their early PGT learning experiences. This is important as students satisfied with the service quality tend to become committed and loyal towards the HEI leading to a long-term relationship as alumni and positive WOM.

E5. Issues with self-direction and autonomy

Increased self-direction and learner autonomy at PGT level can be quite a new experience for students. The students were overwhelmingly positive about this expectation, however.

Some of the representative comments from the respondents are in the box below:

> Respondent SO (Home student) agreed with this when he said, *"I definitely think there is more autonomy here compared to my first couple of years of undergrad"*.
>
> Respondent VI (EU student) was more specific about what he thought this meant, he explained, *"I think that you have to do more post and pre-reading and organise yourself, less about ...the teacher or lecturer tells you have to do this or that to prepare for lectures"*.
>
> Respondent XX (Overseas student) said, *"I think you have to do more on your own if you want to get the most out of it, but this way is independent study, it's different and good"*.

Overall, the respondents expected that greater learner autonomy and independence in their PGT studies would be beneficial to their personal development in becoming more self-reliant and organised. They were positive about this aspect of service quality in experiencing learner self-directedness.

5.1.2.3 Adding value (Theme F)

Theme F draws together aspects which students see as adding value to their study experience, Skills & knowledge development, Future employability and Differentiation.

F6. Skills and knowledge development

Most of the respondents were able to describe various skills that they felt they would be able to improve by completing the PGT programme. Their knowledge development as one might expect was contingent on the specific subject area they were studying. Gaining cultural insights were also mentioned as important. Many students listed critical thinking, communication, teamwork and planning skills as the most important skills to be improved.

> *"I feel I can still improve my critical thinking but that again comes from a lot of reading. So, it's mostly the teamwork I think I will improve"* Respondent AM (EU student).
>
> For Respondent CA (EU student), "I *think maybe communication, better communication".*
>
> Respondent HI (EU student) explained that developing cultural insights would be beneficial, "*I think more so just to be in England, if that makes sense, just to be exposed to the different cultures around campus. I think it helps me in understanding how different values and cultures can be".*

The new knowledge gained and the improvement in skills were seen as important in helping respondents secure future employment in a specific field or role. This was perceived to hold a great deal of added value for the students.

F7. Future employability

One of the key factors that students hoped a PGT qualification would provide was the ability to for them to become more employable and use the valuable knowledge gained from the PGT programme in the workplace. This aspect offers a good deal of added value to the students. Some examples include the following vignettes:

> Respondent JU (EU student) stated, "*I am really hoping to learn …some approaches/models that I can later on use in my career"*.
>
> As Respondent MG (Home student) explained, "*instead of looking at it and thinking okay, I need to remember this for my exam, I'm looking at it now and thinking, oh okay, this is where I could apply it in industry*".
>
> Respondent MI (Overseas student) felt, *"I think I can use the knowledge that comes from the university, I can use it in the future for my job*".

Some students were attracted to the HEI specifically because of the number of students that find graduate jobs or start their own businesses soon after graduation. This information is highlighted in the university's communications and helps promote the institution to prospective students.

> For Respondent RA (Overseas student) this was the case, "*that was one of the reasons why I came here... it is actually helpful doing like a marketing plan and that's something I would like to incorporate in my own business in the future*".

Some of the students felt that the PDP (Personal Development Plan) module with an optional internship forming part of it, was beneficial in preparing them to find permanent employment.

> Respondent UZ (Home student) said, "*the PDP process will really help a lot…with interviews and internships. I am applying for an internship…I emailed my PDP and it will help me in the process. I think this experience will help me to find a good job*".

F8. Differentiation

The differences between UG studies and PGT were considered important by the respondents. They felt they were transitioning to a new and more difficult academic challenge but one that they could do and one that would be beneficial to them in finding a job. This aspect of the programme held perceived added value for the students. The PGT qualification would help to differentiate them in the employment market and set them apart from graduates who only held an undergraduate degree. Employment had become their key goal for the future.

> Respondent CH (EU student) stated that she was now focussed on employability as the end-goal." *I enjoy studying, I enjoy all the procedures but at my age I am thinking about the employability very much now"*.

> Respondent JU (EU student) expressed the following viewpoint, *"I had the feeling that if I want to get into a job and want to get promoted later on, that a master's is always appreciated over a bachelor's and it's going to be easier".*

5.1.3 Moving through transition (strategies) phase - Relationship building approaches

This section of the study relates to the relationship building approaches outlined in the academic literature review in Chapter 2, section 2.6 on the 'moving through' phase or strategies aspect of transition to PGT studies. These aspects provide support to transitioning PGT students through the development of coping strategies to deal with, control, avoid, or prevent stressful situations (Schlossberg et al. 1995). This section outlines relationship building aspects to include the importance of learning communities, networking and social events, culture and language. The overarching aggregated code of relationship building approaches considers student responses in the semi structured interviews in relation to the following areas and groups them into the second order themes G and H, Networking and Events, underpinned by first order concepts.

5.1.3.1 Networking (Theme G)

The second order theme G, Networking, links the grouping of two first order concepts which include: Socialisation processes and Learning community.

G1. Socialisation processes

In this section the student respondents outlined how relationships have been established with their tutors. Establishing a good rapport and relationship early on with tutors was felt to be critical in terms of socialisation and in the students' expectations of successful outcomes.

> Respondent MG (Home student) explained that on the PGT programme, *"there's much more of a rapport building, there's more relationship building with lecturers".*
>
> Respondent NA (EU student) said of the tutors that *" they interact with the students and that's something I really find valuable".*
>
> Respondent RA (Overseas student) said that *" I was too scared that I wasn't going to do well but I think now I'm okay because I have started to get to know the professors…and they're very helpful".*

Student relationships with their tutors are an important aspect of the students' settling in process and in building a meaningful rapport with their tutors. This rapport helps to establish trust between the students and tutors, supporting good working relationships and student satisfaction.

G2. Learning community

The importance of building a learning community and supportive friendly network of staff and students was felt by the respondents to be critical both during the programme and for the future.

> "W*e had like a social gathering where you can connect with other students and even some of the lecturers, and this gives you a better sense of community. So, when you are in lectures now everyone is talking to each other…and integrates with each other"* Respondent UZ (Home student).
>
> Respondent MI (Overseas student) expressed the importance of networking in this way, "*you want to network with many people, you never know who is going to be helpful in the future"*.

Being part of a learning community or COP and networking were seen by the majority of respondents to provide value for them whilst on the PGT programme and for the future. This process will help create a feeling of belonging amongst students and satisfied with their programme choice.

5.1.3.2 Events (Theme H)

The second order theme H links the following first order concepts together; Social events and Culture and language.

H3. Social events

The importance of social events and activities such as seminars, talks and employer/careers events were felt to be beneficial in helping students settle in, to provide opportunities for finding jobs and in getting to know one another. Student respondents said it was important to start networking with other students, staff and others such as potential employers.

> "*I feel like there are quite a lot of events to support us… talks with alumni, talks with other people, from organisations or lecturers from other universities, other's definitely a lot of opportunities for us"* Respondent AM (EU student)*.*
>
> Others felt the events were beneficial "*Networking events, we can never ask (for) enough of them, it's good I think because you can like talk to people and then everyone is just like so interesting. Events like that I think are really going to give you opportunities and you get a chance to know …. course mates as friends. Things like that are really helping"* Respondent XX (Overseas student).

One of the major criticisms of the employer and careers events was that they were much too UK focused which was not beneficial for those returning home overseas to take up employment.

> "At the start I went to more events but now I will no longer attend the careers events because they're only employing for the UK obviously… its very UK centric" Respondent JU (EU student).

Social activities and events are important elements in helping students to make friends, build relationships, network, feel connected and a sense of belonging and to settle into university life.

Some criticisms of the career's events were that they were too UK centric. This is a concern that the university careers service needs to address urgently to ensure all nationalities and cultures are catered for (see section on careers service).

H4. Culture and language

The students expressed that they found PGT study to be a very varied experience in terms of the numbers of students from different cultural backgrounds. Most felt this to be very beneficial in terms of their overall experience.

> *"It was a surprise when I first walked in and realised that the vast majority were international students. It was a pleasant surprise realising it was going to be a bit of a difference"* Respondent MG (Home student).
>
> Respondent VI (EU student) also felt the cultural diversity was beneficial "*I have group work and there are 5 different students from 5 different countries…and that's I think very important for the future, in the working environment…due to globalisation that will help my experience here".*

Some students expressed difficulties in understanding each other due to language barriers and problems with English language capabilities. This was felt to be quite frustrating when trying to organise group work in particular. The issue can lead to dissatisfaction amongst PGT students which could lead to withdrawal if left unaddressed.

> Respondent XX (Overseas student) said she thought this was a problem as an overseas student herself, "*I think there's definitely an issue because basically everyone, they are international students. Like people from India, China, Malaysia, Thailand and no-one speaks perfect English. …and you have some communication issues, not to mention for those who are native speakers. It's a little frustrating".*
>
> Respondent AM (EU student) experienced difficulties with language too*, "It's a struggle…I am finding it quite difficult with the language barrier".*

Language issues represent serious concerns for some PGT learners that need to be resolved urgently. Students cannot work together if they are unable to communicate, so is important to have appropriate language support available.

5.1.4 Moving through transition (self) phase - Identity and personal changes

Based on the transition literature outlined in Chapter 2, section 2.7 on the aspect relating to self, or the "moving through" phase of transition, this section of the case study aims to identify how PGT students' identities are affected by their studies. The overarching aggregated category on identity changes, includes the key second order theme (I) on identity changes which is underpinned by first order sub codes.

5.1.4.1 Identity changes (Theme I)

This second order theme I, seeks to group together key instances where changes due to undertaking PGT study have taken place. The first order concepts identified include: Personal and professional identity, Self-confidence and self-esteem.

I1. Personal and professional identity

The students reported feeling that identity changes were taking place because they were on a PGT programme. The changes included feeling more optimistic and positive for the future and that professional identities were being developed.

> Respondent RA (Overseas student) explained that as she was on the MSc programme she was becoming *"more optimistic, I feel I'm changing, I'm really excited about the future"*.
>
> Respondent VI (EU student) said, "*I think that the international environment here at Aston is really useful especially for growth of my professional identity"*.

This was seen as a positive process as it was perceived to support future success and provided a sense of satisfaction.

I2. Self-confidence and self esteem

The student respondents in this study mostly reported seeing a growth in their self-confidence and esteem as a result of making the transition to PGT study. They reported feeling more well-rounded, adaptable and confident individuals. Some representative examples of the comments made include the following:

> Respondent LI (Local home student), who expressed the hope that he will change as a result of the transition to PGT: "*I'm hoping for my own sake that it's going to change me … to a more well-rounded individual. So, I think it's already changing me …becoming a more adaptable individual who can work with other people better"*. He added that*, "it's kind of giving me that confidence in myself, my self-esteem is growing"*

The students reported that they commenced their studies feeling uncertain and lacking in self-confidence. However, after only a few weeks on the programme, they had already reported a growth in their self-confidence and self-esteem which they felt satisfied would continue as they built stronger relationships and rapport with their peers, tutors and others.

5.1.5 Moving through transition (support) phase - Programme organisation and support services

This section of the study is underpinned by the transition literature outlined in Chapter 2, section 2.8 on the support aspect of the "moving through" phase or support aspect of student transition to PGT study. It aims to explore the importance of learner support for PGT students. Therefore in this section the following second order themes J, K and L are outlined which are supported and underpinned by first order categories identified through the semi structured interviews.

5.1.5.1 Learner support (Theme J)

This second order theme considers the first order concepts of: Programme organisation, Library and LDC, Careers support, Tutor support and Buddies and mentors.

J1. Programme organisation

Organisation of the PGT programmes and services such as timetabling are, for many students, very important aspects in terms of planning their busy schedules.

"I mean the timetable is working out fine, I have no clashes, and it's all worked out pretty well. We have dissertation lectures depending on how we want to structure our dissertation, which is handy. Yeah, I think organisationally I think it's pretty essential" Respondent MG (Home student).

However, many students had experienced some early problems with programme organisation and timetabling, particularly at the beginning of their programmes. There was often an imbalance with the number of modules allocated to the terms.

"It was a little bit chaotic in the beginning, with the module choice, because two of the modules were transferred to term two. So, I think 80% of us now have three modules and in term two we will have five modules. I think this is not the optimal way" Respondent JU (EU student).

Other organisational problems were with the allocation of dissertation supervision.

> *"Currently I think there are some organisational problems. So that's my general impression with the dissertation. The dissertation choice to be honest that's not … I don't think that's fair because it's a first come first served basis"* Respondent VI (EU student).

Overall, the organisation of the PGT programmes is considered to be good, however some reported problems which caused the students to feel some levels of dissatisfaction. Any problems early into the programme should be identified and steps taken to resolve clashes with modules and imbalances between the terms. The allocation of dissertation supervisors creates some disgruntlement amongst a few students and the process needs to be re-considered.

J2. Library and Learning development Centre (LDC)

The library was seen as offering comprehensive support to PGT learners, not only access to books. The LDC is also seen as a valuable resource in terms of providing language and academic support by those that use it, however not all students have used it, or intend to use it. The reasons for this are likely to be varied but require some further investigation.

> Respondent AM (EU student) explained*," I know there's the Learning Development Centre with support for maths but as a student you have to time manage yourself and it feels like there is always so much more you can do. If I have an extra hour I go to the library and read a journal"*.
>
> Respondent YP (Overseas student) was benefitting from some help" *I have some language and academic writing help from the library and LDC".*

However, not everyone takes up the offer of support possibly because there could be some stigma attached to seeking help with studies at PGT level.

> For example, "I *know there are so many courses offered by the library and I personally have not attended one of them, I'm too embarrassed to ask for help.*" Respondent JU (EU student).

The unwillingness to seek support on the part of some PGT students must to be addressed as it could lead to student failure and withdrawal. Students need to be encouraged to access support as early as possible.

J3. Careers support

The student respondents were almost overwhelmingly positive about the early support they received from the university team in terms of their future careers.

For example, "*I've already had a lot of support from the Careers Team at the Business School and it's definitely helping me out already. They're helping me with my CV, my applications for internships and job applications*" Respondent SO (Home student).

Respondent ET agreed that*," the careers support here is very good".*

However, there were some criticisms of this support too.

"*I know there's nothing they can do about it but it's only for UK recruiting. Then you go to the companies and talk to them… they're like you have to apply on our German site. And Okay, also like the CV… how you write one…like our German CV is completely different to the UK one*" Respondent NA (EU student).

Generally, the careers team were singled out for a good deal of praise and satisfaction expressed by PGT students, with lots of beneficial careers fairs and events organised. However, there are some issues with UK centricity that students felt must be addressed, such as support for writing CVs for other countries and the provision of job opportunities overseas.

J4. Tutor support

Many students commented on the role of lecturers and tutors, particularly module leaders, the personal tutors or the Programme Director in providing support.

Some respondents felt that contacting the module lecturer is useful, "*I make appointment with lecturer. I always make appointment*" Respondent ET (Overseas student).

Respondent MG (Home student) felt he could get his queries answered by asking helpful lecturing staff, "*If I have any queries, I know I can reach out because lecturers have a fondness for prioritising master's students which is quite nice*".

Respondent CA (EU student) said, "*I was surprised by the role of the personal tutor because I never had this before*."

However not all students were impressed with the responsiveness of their Programme Director.

Respondent HI (EU student) said, "*probably where (the university) needs to improve a bit because even with our Programme Director…. was not approachable at all, very, very difficult to get in touch with*". She did go onto to say that "*if I had a question, I went to the module leader, generally I had a quick response*".

The approachability and responsiveness of staff, whether they are module leaders, tutors, personal tutors or Programme Directors is felt to be really important by students in terms of supporting their learning and building supportive relationships. The importance of this for any uncertain or anxious students transitioning to PGT studies is supreme.

5.1.6 Moving out (graduation) phase - Post university services

Under this overarching category code, the final transition phase according to Schlossberg et al. (1995), will be considered. Based on the review of the literature in Chapter 2, section 2.9, in the "moving out" phase, the process will culminate with the student successfully graduating from their PGT studies before moving onto another new phase of their life. For PGT students there are some key elements that will facilitate the ending of the transition process post-graduation and the subsequent move onto the next phase of their life such as employment. This overarching code will be further considered under the second order theme; Post PGT services.

5.1.6.1 Post-PGT services (Theme K)

Under second order theme K, the first order concept of alumni services will be explored.

K1. Alumni services

The student respondents commented on the services provided by alumni and the activities they were involved in. Overall, it was felt that these activities were inspirational and useful in terms of providing a high level of perceived added value to their programme experience.

> *"Get maybe some more of our successful alumni to come in, particularly the entrepreneurs"* Respondent ET (Overseas student)
>
> Respondent RA (Overseas student) felt alumni input was very inspiring, "*I think it was last week there was an event here with a few business owners and one of the business owners was from X, she graduated from this university. She was just talking about how it's a good community and she just had a lot of positive things to say about it*".

The use of alumni events are important because they demonstrate how successful past students have become and this can be inspiring for transitioning PGT students. These events also provide excellent networking facilities and occasionally support and advice about employment opportunities.

5.1.7 Study 1 Summary

This study presented findings from semi-structured interviews carried out with a sample of students who had recently transitioned into PGT study. The transcripts of the interviews were coded, grouped into aggregated categories, themes and first order codes using thematic analysis.

The student respondents reported on the mix of motivational factors that led to their choice of university and PGT programmes. They felt that rankings and accreditations achieved by the university were important reputational factors as were the breadth of programme choices. They were less

impacted by TEF or REF standards achieved by the university. The reputation of the university was seen to influence the level of trust they had in the HEI to provide them with the perceived level of quality they were looking for in their programme choices.

Students were most heavily influenced in their choices via the more credible word of mouth recommendations from their friends, family, peers and even tutors from other institutions. The quality of information provided by the university to students via the website, Open Days and agents are all vital to supporting the students' choices. Access to module descriptors early on helps support their choice and preparation for their PGT studies.

Many students expressed very mixed feelings about their transition to PGT studies. Some were excited and confident whilst others were nervous, panicked and felt overwhelmed. The importance of relationship building, networking, social activities and having a supportive environment via a learning community were stressed to help the students build their confidence and satisfaction. Some students expressed issues with the language barrier but enjoyed the exposure to other cultures and customs.

Overall, the respondents reported early levels of satisfaction with the PGT learning experience, with supportive tutors and increased autonomy as learners. The service quality provided was felt to be good. However, some felt that making the transition to PGT study was quite a substantial challenge both academically and culturally. Students from overseas felt that the learning and teaching styles used in the UK were quite different to those used in their home countries and they needed to adapt to this. They were positive about moving through the transition successfully towards graduation. Some felt that time management was difficult but overall, the programme was something they felt they could all cope with and they were satisfied with their learning experiences on their PGT programmes. In terms of their skills development, the students explained that they were developing a range of transferable skills on their programmes including critical thinking, communications, teamwork and planning. Gaining cultural insights from others was also felt to be beneficial. Students perceived that the added value gained from their skills development would help them to secure future employment. The value of the PGT qualification would be in helping them to differentiate themselves in the employment market from other graduates with 'only' an undergraduate degree.

In terms of changes to their identity as learners, the respondents reported early increased levels of self-confidence and self-esteem as a result of being on a PGT programme. They felt that their skills and knowledge were improving in specialist areas which would assist them in finding employment. They reported feeling as if they were treated like adults by their tutors and were happy with the service they provided.

The range of support services was appreciated, if not used, by all PGT students. The library was praised for its attentive staff, as was the careers service, although there was some criticism that it was too UK centric in focus. The alumni service was known to some extent for providing talks and events. However, students, on the whole, were satisfied and felt loyal and committed to the HEI. They expressed a wish to become alumni themselves upon graduation, mostly for networking purposes and the opportunity to "give something back" to the university.

5.2 Findings: Study 2

The second study consisted of semi structured interviews with a purposive sample of 13 UG students in October/November 2017. These students were considering enrolling for PGT programmes both at X University and with other HEIs, either in the UK or overseas. The same set of questions were used with UG students as for study 1. Please refer to Appendix 2 for details of the individual, although anonymised, participants.

Table 5.3. Summary of themes from Study 2

	Category codes	Transition Phase	Second order themes	First order concepts
1.	**Personal motivations and influences affecting choices**	Moving in Phase (Pre-transition)	A. Interest in subject area	1. Personal interest 2. Self-development 3. Specialism
			B. Choice of university	4. University reputation (rankings & accreditation) 5. Previous experience of the university 6. Family/peer/tutor influences 7. Open days, applications & information quality
			C. Choice of programme	8. Costs & financing PGT 9. Building on existing knowledge 10. Building on previous work experience
2.	**Expectations, experiences & value of PGT studies**	Moving Through Phase (Situation)	D. Preparation for & expectations of PGT study	1. Feelings about PGT 2. Importance of preparation 3. Challenges of PGT study
			E. Programme experiences & activities	4. Learning activity
			F. Adding value	5. Skills and knowledge development 6. Future employability 7. Differentiation

	Category codes	Transition Phase	Second order themes	First order concepts
3.	**Relationship building approaches**	Moving Through Phase (Support)	G. Networking	1. Relationships 2. Learning community
			H. Events	3. Social events 4. Culture & language
4.	**Identity and personal changes**	Moving Through Phase (Self)	I. Identity changes	1. Personal & professional identity 2. Self-confidence & self esteem
5.	**Programme support and facilities**	Moving Through Phase (Support)	J. Learner support	1. Programme organisation & timetabling 2. Dedicated office support 3. Library/LDC 4. Careers support 5. Tutor support
6.	**Alumni services**	Moving out Phase (Graduation)	K. Post university services	1. Alumni services

5.2.1 Moving in (pre-transition) Phase - Personal motivations and influences affecting choices.

For this first section of this study, the aim is to report and uncover UG student's personal motivations and choices of subject area to study as postgraduates, how and why they have chosen the university and the reasons for choosing specific PGT programmes. The first overarching category code groups together second order themes (A, B and C) supported by first order concepts, which analyses students' choices and motivations in greater depth.

5.2.1.1 Interest in subject area (Theme A)

Theme A groups together the following first order concepts: Personal interest, Self-development and Specialism.

A1. Personal interest

The UG respondents outlined their personal interests and reasons for considering transitioning into in a particular subject area at PGT level. This is usually because they had become interested in certain areas after studying other subjects at bachelors' level or they wanted to gain a deeper insight into a particular subject.

> There were a few reasons for Respondent DA's (Home student) interest which included the subject area, "*I mean, there's a few things. I think really the first one is my own personal self-interest. So, I'm looking at studying Accounting which is a bit of a change from the Business & Management one. It's going to enhance my skill set which I'll hope will look better on my CV and obviously to potential employers.*"
>
> Respondent KE (Overseas student) explained that he was mostly interested in the subject, "*I am really interested in the subject area. I am going to do MSc SMM (Strategic Marketing Management). I picked this topic because I think it will be really interesting for me personally to study new things*".

It is important that subject specialisms in PGT programmes are offered that allow students to gain deeper insights and develop further skills within subject areas. However, conversion programmes are required in subject areas not studied before at UG level, allowing students to transition into a completely new area of study.

A2. Self-development

UG respondents explained that they were hoping to develop themselves further in terms of meeting new people and gaining new skills and knowledge by undertaking a PGT programme.

> A good example of this came from Respondent KE (Overseas student) who said he was looking forward to meeting new people and learning new things, "*I want to meet new people and develop myself further. I am*

> *strongly motivated to seek out new learning and try new experiences."*
>
> Respondent CZ (Overseas student) felt that doing a PGT programme would help him become more professional, *"I think I will become more of a professional type person by doing the MSc. I will be more mature and have more specialist knowledge and ideas."*
>
> Respondent GS (Home student) stated was hoping that she would gain new insights and ideas, *"I would hope that when I'm in different settings and different scenes, it doesn't matter if it's a social setting or a professional setting, for me to bring more in-depth and kind of valid ideas to a conversation."*

The need for further self-development to become professional and the opportunity to meet new people were expressed by many UG respondents in this study as motivators to undertake PGT study.

A3. Specialism

Some UG respondents said that they particularly wanted to study a specific specialist subject at PGT level and had chosen the university and programmes they would go on to study on this basis.

> Respondent GS (Home student) stated that she had chosen the programme on this basis, *"I'm interested in the programme because I think it's a little bit more specialised, so I'd want it to be at a university where the work and the course match and what it entails appeals to me*."
>
> Respondent KA (EU student) felt that her interest in a specific subject had been piqued by studying an undergraduate module and would consider future employment or enterprise development in that area. She stated, *"If I do go onto a programme then it will probably be IB (international Business) because I enjoyed the International Marketing module and want to know more about doing business overseas and how importing & exporting works. I think there will be opportunities jobwise in that area or maybe I will set up my own company to do this".*
>
> Respondent LI (Overseas student) also felt that a specialist PGT programme would help her attain her career aspirations, *"The PG programme at this university will help me to become a marketing manager in future, it will help with getting a job and become a specialist, an expert in this field. It will be a big success story for me."*

The variety of PGT programme offerings are considered by UG students as a gateway into a future career or business opportunity in a specialist area, particularly if they have studied a broader based programme at UG level.

5.2.1.2 Choice of university (Theme B)

These concepts include, University reputation (to include both rankings and accreditation), Previous experience of the university, Family, peer or tutor advice and Open days, applications and information.

B4. University reputation (rankings & accreditation)

This concept is an important factor in the respondents' choice of university and their motivations for pursuing PGT study. The students felt that the reputation of the university and how it was ranked and accredited would impact on their choice of university for their PGT studies. Their perceptions of quality, as indicated by the university's reputation, is a strong indicator for placing trust in the institution.

> Respondent DA (Home student) thought, "*Well, I think, first of all, one of the things is the name or brand of the university and that goes with the reputation, and that's not just built on what you look at online; it's, you know, word of mouth reputation. And things like rankings of course*."
>
> Respondent LI (Overseas student) felt that the university was known for its quality overseas and stated, "X *has good reputation as a Business school in China. It has the triple accreditation which not many schools have. Also, my friends say X is good for Marketing. It has a good reputation*".

It seems that the university brand is a known commodity and linked with a good reputation in the minds of the students which has been developed via WOM and rankings. Importantly, it seems that having a good reputation overseas which is vital in attracting students. Accreditation is also an important indicator of good quality engendering trust in the university.

B5. Previous experience of the university

This concept was important to some of the students, as their familiarity with the university and past satisfactory experiences with it, this influences their willingness to remain committed and loyal to the university therefore chose to remain at the university for their PGT studies.

> Respondent KE (Overseas student) felt this was an important factor for him, "*Although I'm doing my UG degree at X it makes sense for me to stay here because I know the school and it's a good school. It is ranked and has the triple accreditation thing. I know lots of people here too. My family are happy for me to stay here*".
>
> Respondent CZ (Overseas student) agreed*, "I think the PG programme is good and I'd like to remain in a good school like X. It has good name in China"*.

The overseas students were mostly keen to remain at the university for their PGT studies due its perceived good reputation.

B6. Family/ peer/tutor influences

This first order concept is crucial as the opinions of family and friends or tutors are prime motivators in terms of influencing UG students' choice of university for their PGT studies.

> Respondent CP (Overseas student) felt his father's advice was important in influencing his choice of where to do PGT studies, "*I mean that I spoke with my father and he was like because X is a good university, either you're going to do master's in X or somewhere better* ".
>
> Respondent DA (Home student) said that his tutors influenced his decision, "*Everyone's aware that some unis are better than others and—but then, I think it comes down to, as well the information that can be provided, the confidence you gain from either the lecturers, it's the feeling you get from them, whether they seem enthusiastic and confident that the course will provide you with what you need.*"

It is important for universities to remember that when marketing their PGT programmes that their audience are not only the potential students, but it also includes their family, friends and other influencers. Lecturers and tutors can play an important role in guiding graduates towards suitable programmes, so their ongoing relationships with graduating students are important to sustain.

B7. Open days, applications and information

The UG respondents said that the events like Open Days and meetings with Programme Directors and contact with admissions staff and others, supported the PGT application process and provided prospective students with plenty of useful advice.

> Respondent CH (EU student) attended an Open Day which was useful, "*I went to one of the Open Days and met the Programme Director. He gave me lots of advice about the programme*." She then added," *I haven't applied to X just yet. I hope I am not too late.*"
>
> Respondent DA (Home student) had not attended an Open Day but intended to, "*I haven't really been to like any kind of events or like anything like that. It's just been looking online and then I've sent emails to some of the staff involved in that course just to get a bit more information. I suppose the next step, which I haven't done yet, would be to attend an open day and to find out a bit more...*"

It is important that early contact is established with UG students considering applying for PGT study. PGT students expect to have regular updates to make them feel welcome and to help in prepare them for their programmes. Alumni talks and information should be made available and contact with Programme Directors so that relationships can established as early as possible. Open Days are clearly very important vehicles for the dissemination of programme information and meeting with Programme Directors. Detailed programme information on content and learning and teaching strategies should also be made available via the website and/or videos. This should include Open Day details and links to Programme Directors.

> Respondent AS (Overseas student) said more information was required and talks given by alumni,*" I think the university could help by sending me more information or even videos about what it's like to do a masters. Perhaps with students who have studied on PG programmes before talking about what to expect, what has been the biggest problems they had to overcome."*
>
> Respondent CH (EU student) felt that there was not enough information about PGT studies but plenty of information about graduate job schemes," *In terms of information I went online initially. I looked at what was there and it made me want to know more. I don't remember getting any information about it directly – there weren't any talks given about doing a master's, at least I didn't know about any. There were lots of talks about and information about grad schemes. It is all geared up here towards getting a job once you graduate."*
>
> Respondent KA (EU student) needed to know when the Open Days were being held, "*I have looked online for information about the IB programme but not spoken to the Programme Director yet or been to any of the Open Days. It would have been helpful if we had had some talks organised about the PG programmes, rather than all the focus on getting on a graduate scheme."*

The various forms of marketing communication do not appear to be sufficient in encouraging UG students make the transition across to PGT studies. Respondents reported that they thought there was too much emphasis on encouraging and supporting UG students to go directly into employment but insufficient information about PGT programmes.

5.2.1.3 Choice of programme (Theme C)

The first order concepts grouped under theme C include: Costs and financing PGT studies, Building on existing knowledge and Previous work experience.

C8. Costs and financing PGT studies

It seems that programme fees are important influences on UG students' choices and motivations to transition to PGT study. The 20% discount in fees for existing UG students and lower living costs in Birmingham, particularly when compared with London, can be important motivators for remaining with the HEI.

> As respondent KE (Overseas student) stated," *I have applied to the programme and am waiting to hear back. One thing that attracted me to stay with X was the reduction in PG fees of 20% because I'm doing UG here. This was attractive for me. I didn't want to go to a new city where I didn't know anyone and it was more expensive.*"
>
> Respondent SU (Local student), felt that remaining in the city was a good choice and stated "*All I knew was about the 20% discount and student loan which seems good. It also means I can live at home and not move to another city, such as London which is very expensive*."

The pricing strategy adopted for PGT programmes can have a significant impact on UG students' decisions about continuing their studies with the university. The discounted fees available to

graduating UG students already at an HEI play an important role in their decision to remain with the HEI. Students local to the area are able to live at home and feel it helps in reducing the overall cost of PGT study.

The UG respondents reported a mixed picture in terms of financing their PGT studies. Some were planning to take out a student loan, or were self-financing their studies, or their parents were supporting them and paying their fees.

> Respondent SU (Home student) was clear about this and said, "*I'm planning to get a student loan to finance my fees.*"
>
> Respondent GS (Home student) hadn't realised a student loan was possible for PGT studies, "*I didn't think Masters' students got loans or … I didn't realise that. I thought you had to pay for it yourself or something and I was already talking to my grandparents and my parents about it.*"
>
> Respondent CP (Overseas student) also had support from his father, "*I spoke with my father, and as long as it's X, he's willing to fund me.*"

Information about the availability of student loans for PGT study and information about how to apply for loans could prove very useful to students.

C9. Building on existing knowledge

This concept considers the motivation for students to build on their UG studies by undertaking a master's level programme. Students felt this was an important factor influencing their motivations to start PGT study. Overall, the students in this study felt they were ready and able to successfully commence their PGT studies.

> Respondent DA (Home student) explained that "*I feel ready. I feel—like obviously, it took a bit of convincing myself because obviously I'm going to come straight out of university and then go into another year of university. I'll still be in the kind of mind set of, writing essays and on studying and the whole concept of referencing and things like that. Whereas I think if you take a break or something like that, you might forget a lot of the kind of fundamental things, so....*"
>
> For Respondent JW (Overseas student) the choice of master's programme was important in terms of building on his previous undergraduate programme, "*the course is still a Marketing course, so I can imagine I can do it … because I look at the course and it has similar content to the bachelor's*".

It is important that students graduating from UG studies are made to feel ready to embark upon PGT studies. Many UG students feel that they are still in "study mode" and that it would be easier to carry on to master's than waiting and undertaking the programme later on.

C10. Previous work experience

Some students were motivated to build upon their work-based experiences by doing a master's level programme. The students felt this was an important factor influencing their motivation to start PGT studies.

> Respondent CH (EU student) explained that doing a master's in a new subject area would build on her work experience*," I'm excited because it would be kind of a change. Not that I don't like what I'm doing now but just something different and to see how that would go".*
>
> Respondent GS (Home student) felt that it was important to build on existing knowledge, *"having worked 15 months in a corporate environment, I've kind of seen how much expertise and knowledge I would need to have to get to a certain level i.e. Master's, in those competitive industries.. So that's how I should start looking into it".*

Given the importance of potentially building on their work-based experience via PGT studies, a continued relationship with an HEI may assist graduates' career prospects by undertaking PGT programme after some work experience which they can they build upon.

5.2.2 Moving through transition (situation) phase - Expectations, experiences and value of PGT studies

This section of the case study seeks to explore the expectations and experiences of students in the "moving through" situational phase of transition to PGT studies. Under this general, aggregated code, expectation, experiences and value of PGT study links together several main themes (D, E and F) together with underpinning groups of first order concepts.

5.2.2.1 Preparation for PGT studies (Theme D)

This theme groups the following subcategories: Feelings about PGT study and Importance of preparation.

D1. Feelings about PGT study

Respondents were asked about their overall feelings towards starting a PGT programme. Most of them had rather mixed feelings of excitement and confidence but some nervousness and apprehension too. There was a sense of the newness of it all, being a bit overwhelmed and not being sure what to expect. The following responses were typical:

> Respondent DA (Home student) felt rather apprehensive but also positive about starting a new programme, *"I'm a bit apprehensive, it's another year and so that's kind of making me feel apprehensive, and, a bit of nervous in terms of starting a new programme. Everyone always feels a bit apprehensive towards change. But, I'm also confident and positive that it will be a nice year of experience."*
>
> Respondent JW (Overseas student) envisaged PGT study as the start of something new, *"It is well a brand new start, its postgraduate, you're going to meet new people, and the environment will totally change. And you don't know what challenge you are facing too. So yeah, that's … but just a little bit nervous."*

Some of the overseas (Chinese) respondents reported that they were worried about the possibility of failure and of letting down their families as a result.

> *"To be honest I feel a little bit panicked about starting the new course. I am not sure if I can do it and I hope I don't fail. I will try hard, work really hard to do the reading and all the coursework and exams well."* Respondent LI (Overseas student)
>
> Respondent CZ (Overseas student) was also worried about letting his family down, *"I feel happy to be moving onto master's level but I am a little bit scared too. I don't want to let myself down or my family down by failing. So, I need to work hard to make sure I pass the exams and other assessments like dissertation. This will make me feel good and proud to get this far."*

The university needs to allay UG students' concerns and nervousness about transitioning to PGT study by ensuring that students are fully made aware about what to expect. This situation can be alleviated through better marketing communications and by building trust with students. It seems that overseas students (in this case, Chinese students in particular) as they have a real fear of failing expensive PGT programmes that their families are supporting, thereby letting their families down. This is a cause for concern which can be mitigated through careful and transparent student recruitment practices and encouragement to seek early support and mentoring. Early communications to build dialogue and trust would seem to be beneficial in establishing a rapport with transitioning PGT students.

D2. Importance of preparation

The UG student respondents mostly felt that were prepared and ready to undertake the transition into PGT study, although they felt that some reading and prior preparation was necessary. Many felt that going straight into PGT study from their UG studies was helpful.

> Respondent CH (EU student) felt the UG programme was the best preparation for PGT study, *"The UG programme should be preparation for doing a PG programme. However, I think it's important to do some reading up beforehand so that you feel ready to take on the challenge. The Programme Director recommended some books to me to read. He also told me a bit about the exams and other assessments. It's important to know these things."*

> Respondent CZ (Overseas student) said he hadn't started to prepare but would do so, *"Not much preparation as yet but I plan to do some reading about the subject areas to familiarise myself as much as possible. The Programme Director gave me some information about what I could start to look at."*

It cannot be assumed that all students feel totally prepared to take on PGT studies directly from their UG programmes. A "PGT starter pack" that could be sent to applicants prior to starting their PGT programme. The pack could inform students about what and how they should prepare for the programme they are transitioning into. Early contact with the appropriate Programme Director may help to build relationships and allay any anxieties students may be suffering.

D3. Challenges of PGT study

The UG respondents perceived that PGT study would be challenging for them academically and felt that they would need to work hard to be successful. However, they were positive in about their ability to able to take on the challenge and felt ready and well prepared to do so. The following are examples of respondents' feedback:

> Respondent CH (EU student) felt it would be an enjoyable challenge and she would need to work hard, *"I expect to work really hard. Really concentrate on lectures and do a lot of reading. But although it will be really challenging, I think I'll enjoy it and push myself"*.
>
> Respondent CZ (Overseas student) thought it would be challenging too but he would ask for help if things were difficult, *"It will be challenging time but I have to believe that I can pass the course. If I find things difficult, I can ask course mates or my professors to help me."*
>
> Like others, Respondent KE (Overseas student) felt ready to take on the challenge, *"I expect that I will need to put in lots of hours adapting to the workload and it will be very hectic. I am ready and prepared to do it though. I think it will be a challenge but I'm ready for it. I think I feel like this because I am a very motivated person, I want to show to everyone that I can do it."*

Despite perceiving PGT study to be challenging the respondents felt that with hard work and with some help if necessary, they would complete a PGT programme. Some students experience difficulties when they commence PGT studies and these issues can be exacerbated for overseas students when trying to adapt to a self-directed form of study when they are used to a more didactic form of teaching. The students in this study were overwhelmingly positive and motivated to succeed at this level, however. The support of peers, tutors and others is important to establish through early, ongoing, contact to develop supportive relationships and learning communities.

5.2.2.2 Programme experiences and activities (Theme E)

Theme E includes the first order concept to include: Learning activity

E4. Learning activity

This theme considers the UG students' expectations in relation to future PG learning activities. This feedback provides their thoughts on programme intensity and focus, some of the difficulties that they may encounter and how much support they feel will be available to them.

Respondent KE (Overseas student) thought that PGT study would be challenging and students could not expect much support, "*In terms of learning I think it will be challenging. It will be focused, and I think there is an expectation that PG students are more self-sufficient. They have to get on with learning the subject content independently with minimal support*".

Respondent US (Local student) felt that moving from UG to PGT would be a big jump up, "*I'm not too sure about it, but generally I think it will be like my learning jump from my second year of university to now my final year. Maybe because I've had a year out, but I am finding final year a lot more intense.*"

The students felt that PGT study would constitute a focused and intense learning experience that, for some, would appear to be a big step up in terms of level of difficulty and challenge, possibly with limited support provided.

The university should try to allay the students' concerns particularly about the perceived lack of support at an early stage of their communications with potential and newly transitioning PGT students. It can also help and encourage students to help each other though networking events and activities to prevent service dissatisfaction and possible withdrawal.

5.2.2.3 Adding value (Theme F)

Under this second order theme, the following first order concepts are grouped: Skills and knowledge development, Future employability and Differentiation.

F5. Skills and knowledge development

The UG respondents described their expectations in terms of the skills that they felt they would be able to improve by completing the PGT programme. They listed critical analysis, confidence, communication, research, leadership, teamwork, planning and time management skills as the most important areas they wanted to develop. Their knowledge development depended on the specific subject area they were studying to help secure a job role in the future.

Respondent KE (Overseas student) wanted to develop a number of important skills through the PGT programme, "*I want to develop my leadership skills more whilst I am doing the MSc. This will help me for future roles. I also want work on time management skills, research and analytical skills, although I think I am quite strong in these areas anyway. As the programme is intense anyway, I think this will happen as I go along. I will gain good specialist knowledge from the professors who will teach us.*"

> Respondent LI (Overseas student) thought that her skills in certain areas could be more developed alongside specialist marketing knowledge, "*Skills I hope to improve are communication, like speaking up in class and writing skills. Also, the critical analysis and time management will get improved too. For the knowledge it will be more in-depth about various topics, more specialised things.*"

It is important that PGT students are given the opportunity to improve a variety of skills, alongside the specialist knowledge development provided by the programme, to add value and help them secure future employment in a specific field or role.

F6. Future employability

The UG students expected that obtaining a PGT qualification would add value by provide them with opportunities to gain employment in a specialist field. Some good examples include the following.

> Respondent CH (EU student) felt that more employment opportunities would become available to her, "*I think my job prospects will be much better in marketing as there seems to be a lot of jobs advertised there. I think this programme will give me both the academic knowledge and the practical side in terms of helping start a career.*"
>
> Respondent KA (EU student) felt similarly, "*Having a master's degree will make me more employable in any case. It's a higher level of qualification and requires a lot of hard work and dedication, so it's worth the extra effort to get it.*".

The UG students felt that having an additional degree would help them secure employment in a specialist field and it would be worth the extra effort to obtain it.

F7. Differentiation

The UG students felt that one of the major reasons they wanted to undertake a PGT qualification as an important way to differentiate themselves from other students who have graduated with a bachelor's degree.

> Respondent AS (Overseas student) felt wanted to distinguish himself from other graduates and to forge contacts and potential partners, "*nowadays, everyone has a degree; so that's what distinguishes you from the others, I suppose is the master's degree and it's from X! And then like doing master's, you are actually going to explore the culture and meeting people who may be a potential business partner and like building a network.*"
>
> Respondent KA (EU student) thought that having a PGT qualification would be a good differentiator in the job market, "*The beauty of having a master's qualification is that I believe it sets you apart from a lot of other applicants for grad scheme jobs. There are so many people with a BSc now all competing for jobs, I think having an MSc from X will give me the edge.*"

The value of holding a PGT qualification is an important message particularly for those UG students who are unlikely to gain a first or 2.1 classification for their bachelor's degree. PGT study provides

an opportunity for some students, particularly those from Post 1992 universities to "trade up", as they see it, to a university with a better reputation and obtain a master's level qualification there.

5.2.3 Moving through transition (strategies) phase - Relationship building approaches

This section of the study relates to the relationship building approaches outlined in the academic literature review in Chapter 2, section 2.6 on the 'moving through' phase or strategies aspect of transition to PGT studies. These aspects provide support to transitioning PGT students through the development of coping strategies to deal with, control, avoid, or prevent stressful situations. The category code for relationship building approaches outlines the second order themes (G and H), Networking and Events.

5.2.3.1 Networking (Theme G)

Under theme G, the first order codes can be grouped together as: Socialisation processes and Learning community.

G1. Socialisation processes

In this section the UG respondents considered how relationships could be established with the programme, their tutors and with other students. Establishing a good rapport and relationships early on was felt to be critical in terms of support and networking.

> Respondent KA (EU student) thought it is was important that relationship building started early on, *"in terms of a relationship I think this will start to happen once I apply and the programme knows who I am. I hope that they will reach out to me and guide me. I think I need them to convince me that it is absolutely the right programme for me. So, once I apply, I will expect to hear from them quite soon, by email and to invite me to Open Days and maybe other events. Start building the relationship between us."*
>
> Respondent CZ (Overseas student) said, "*It's important to make friends so they can help you and you can help them. Make strong friendships and relationships with them and with the professors also. It is important for me to network and build a circle of close friends and contacts on the MSc programme."*

Relationships with tutors and friends is an important aspect of the students' settling in process and in building a meaningful rapport. This rapport helps to establish trust between the students and tutors and supports good working relationships and satisfaction.

G2. Learning community

The importance of building a learning community (CoP) and a supportive network was felt by UG respondents to be critical both during the PG programme and for the future.

> For example, Respondent KA (EU student) explained the importance of developing a learning community, *"I'm hoping that we can build a strong community of learners on the IB programme. If the programme has relatively small numbers it will help because we will be able to get to know each other better. It would be good to get to know your classmates well in PG to support each other."*
>
> Respondent US (Local Student) expressed the following about a learning community, *"It is of importance to me because obviously it's jumping into something that I haven't done before, I think that is important to learn from others, to have … that community available to ask questions and get support."*

Being part of a learning community and networking were seen by the majority of respondents to be very important vehicles for support once they joined a PGT programme and going forward into the future.

5.2.3.2 Events (Theme H)

The second order theme H links the following concepts together; Social events and Culture and language.

H3. Social events

Social events and activities offered by university societies and clubs were felt to be beneficial in helping students to get to know one another and to form friendships, working relationships and networks.

> Respondent LI (Overseas student) felt it was important to get involved in events and network, *"I intend to build a strong network whilst I am here doing PG. It's important because you never know what is going to happen in the future. I will be going to various networking events during my time on the SIB programme. Need to get involved and be known by your peers. I will be going to as many events as I possibly can even though time will be tight."*
>
> Respondent CZ (Overseas student) said that he would only go to events organised by the university, *"I don't plan to spend much time socialising in the partying sense. I will go to university organised events and networking but not anything else. I need to be focused on passing the course and studying hard.*

The respondents recognised that as PGT students there may be less time for these activities than they had as UG students and some wanted to focus more on their studies instead of socialising. However, social activities and events are important elements in helping students to network, build relationships, network, feel connected thereby creating a sense of belonging and helping them to settle in.

H4. Culture & language

The UG students said that they expected PGT study would be an opportunity for them to learn about and establish links with students from other cultures and backgrounds. They felt it would expose them to a diversity of culture and languages. They commented that this would be beneficial in terms of their PGT experience.

> Respondent AS (Overseas, Chinese student) commented on the importance of culture and language. He said, *"One thing I will learn about I guess is culture, like learning different cultures in different environment, and then of course more confidence in speaking in English, improving my language skills.*
>
> Respondent CH (EU student) said *"It will be good to meet new people too as I think there is a lot of diversity on a PG course. It will be good to learn about other cultures and know more about the experiences of others from different countries and backgrounds to mine."*

The UG students were very positive about the benefits of working with a diverse cohort of students and building good social benefits in terms of working relationships and developing a rapport with them.

5.2.4 Moving through transition (self) phase - Identity and personal changes

Based on the transition literature outlined in Chapter 2, section 2.7 on the aspect relating to self, the third "moving through" phase of transition, this section of the case study aims to identify how PGT student identities are affected by their studies. The category code for identity and personal changes outline the second order theme I, Identity changes.

5.2.4.1 Identity changes (Theme I)

This second order concepts links together the following first order concepts: Personal and professional identity and Self-confidence and self-esteem.

I1. Personal and professional identity

The UG students felt that their professional identity would be enhanced by undertaking a PGT qualification and that having achieved the qualification would make them feel good about themselves, providing them with feeling of having a more professional identity, having a sense of pride and accomplishment. This achievement would also please their families.

> Respondent AS (Overseas student) said that he would have a sense of pride, *"Having a master's qualification will make me feel good about myself. My parents will be proud, so I will be proud too. I will feel more professional as I will have more knowledge and better skills, more expertise."*
>
> Respondent CZ (Overseas student) said he would become more professional as he would have gained specialist knowledge, *"I think I will become more of a professional type person by doing the MSc. I will be more mature and have more specialist knowledge and ideas."*
>
> Respondent CP (Overseas student) stated that he would also feel more professional, *"In terms of developing a professional identity, for me it's about being challenged, really. So, I don't know if I can do that. I'd expect that to come from the course."*

The UG students strongly expressed ideas that the PGT programme would help them to feel a sense of pride and achievement. They also expected to be developed professionally. It is important that their achievements are celebrated, and the programme content helps them to achieve their sense of professionalism and satisfaction.

I2. Self confidence and self-esteem

The UG respondents reported that they thought their self-confidence and self-esteem would grow as a result of making the transition to PGT study. They thought they would feel a sense of pride, confidence and self-assurance as a result.

> Respondent DA (Home student) said he expected to feel confident and self-assured as a result of doing the PGT programme," I *think with just one year of postgraduate study, I would feel proud and a bit more confident in myself. I don't think there'll be major changes, a bit more confidence, a bit more self-assurance, and knowing a bit more about my capabilities and perhaps understanding where I might have more weaknesses."*
>
> Respondent KA (EU student) said it would make her feel different about herself and boost her self-esteem" *It will boost my confidence and make me feel different about myself. I will know that I have achieved something that not too many people have. I will have more learning and it will give my self-esteem a lift."*

The students expected PGT programmes to provide growth for them in terms of new skills, abilities, confidence and self-esteem. They felt these newfound changes offered them better opportunities.

5.2.5 Moving through transition (support) phase - Programme organisation and support services

This section of study 2 is underpinned by the transition literature outlined in Chapter 2, section 2.8 on the support aspect of the "moving through" phase or support aspect of student transition to PGT study. The category code for programme organisation and support services outlines the second order theme J, Learner support.

5.2.5.1 Learner support (Theme J)

This second order theme J, groups the first order concepts to include: Programme organisation, Library and LDC, Careers support, Tutor support and Study buddies and mentors.

J1. Programme organisation

The UG respondents mostly felt that the same level of programme support would be available to them once they were PGT students.

> Respondent CZ (Overseas student) said, "*There will be support and information for PG students provided from the Hub and the Programme Office. It is sufficient*"
>
> Respondent KE (Overseas student) felt that support would be provided for PGT students but that he personally preferred to be self-reliant*, "There is help available from the Student Union and the Hub for other aspects that postgraduate students might need help with, such as disabilities or financial support. The tutors are pretty helpful but I prefer to be a bit more self-reliant and not be looking for help."*

The UG students felt that those students on PGT programmes should expect a good level of support from a number of available services in relation to their programme. However, some of them would require encouragement to make use of the support offered.

J2. Library and LDC

Most of the UG respondents understood that the library and LDC offered comprehensive support to learners. However, some students felt that either the library or LDC would not be willing to provide as much support to them as PGT students, or they felt awkward about asking for help.

> Respondent CH (EU student) said she felt support would be available, "*In terms of support I know that I can go to the library and LDC for support. I don't know if there is any further specialised support for PG students.*"
>
> Respondent LI (Overseas student) said*, "The library and LDC are good at supporting students so I will continue to use their services. Perhaps they won't help as much as for UG students. I am not sure."*
>
> However, Respondent CP (Overseas student) said that he knew the services available but would not use them, "*Well personally I know of these services but I never used them. There are a few reasons. I just really … first of all I find it is like a bit awkward asking for help because you just think that you're so weak, like you have to seek external help. And also, you don't know like what the problem is, maybe it's more about yourself, like internal issues*".

The two students who commented that they didn't need or would not want to ask for help, were both from overseas and were non-native English speakers. There should not be any embarrassment or shame in asking for help. PGT students need to access support they need early on rather than

struggle and be dissatisfied or discouraged and subsequently withdraw. The importance of asking for help should be encouraged.

J3. Careers support

Only one UG student commented specifically on careers support for PGT students as he had heard about it.

> Respondent DA (Home student) said, *"I've heard there's encouragement for postgrads to attend workshops where you can understand how to improve your CV and there's information on how to go about getting yourself an internship and how to go about applying for future jobs and things like that".*

The careers support available to PGT students should be more widely known about. PGT students are able to attend many tailor-made workshops and other events to aid their future employability. There is also a good deal of support available to them to help secure short internships.

J4. Tutor support

Many of the UG students commented on the role of lecturers, or module leaders in providing an excellent level of service quality and support and hoped this would be the same at PGT level.

> As Respondent LI (Overseas student) explained, *"The tutors have been helpful in UG I hope this will be the same in PG. When I had problem before with my work, I would see the module leader and they were mostly helpful."*
>
> Respondent SU (Home student) thought that support at PGT level would be good if not better than at UG level, *"Support for PG students should be good here. I think PG students might it need more than UGs. It's because we will be under greater pressure so support should be in place if we need it."*

However, some students held an opposing viewpoint and thought that although the support from lecturers was good at UG level, it might not be the same at PGT level.

> Respondent ES (EU student) felt that, *"There was a lot of support available in UG when it came to academic learning, I know that my lecturers are very friendly and they always have office hours for whoever needs them most and they're happy to have a discussion with you after a lecture. I think that it won't be the same in PG because everyone will be doing a different research and it will take a long time to talk to your peers or talk to the academic leader about something that you're researching and what their thoughts are on it."*
>
> Respondent AS (Overseas student) also thought that this would be the case, *"I don't think there will be too much support, I think in PG they just generally focus on delivering to you and there's a lot of material to cover."*

Students need to know that they can expect to receive the same levels of lecturer/tutor support that they experienced at UG level. If students are aware of the support available, they are likely to feel less anxious, nervous or become dissatisfied.

5.2.6 Moving out (graduation) phase – Post university services

In this section, the final transition phase will be considered. This 'moving out' phase through culminates with students successfully completing this transition and graduating from PGT study before moving onto another new phase.

5.2.6.1 Post-university services (Theme K)

Under theme K the following first order concept includes: Alumni services.

K1. Alumni services

Some UG student respondents commented that more information about PGT programmes could be provided by alumni about their experiences and the usefulness of doing a PGT programme.

> Respondent US (Local student) thought this would be very useful, *"So being a master's student it would be interesting to get the view from other ex-masters' students. It would helpful for master's students to have alumni come back and talk about their experiences. Did they just go to a grad job? Did they regret their decision about doing a master's?"*
>
> Respondent AS (Overseas student) also felt that hearing first-hand from alumni about their PG experiences would be helpful, *"Perhaps talking with students who have studied on MSc programmes before, talking about what to expect, what have been the biggest problems they had to overcome etc., would help us."*

The alumni could speak to UG students about their personal experiences of doing a PGT programme and the impact the experience had on their careers. This may encourage more UG students to undertake a master's programme.

5.2.7 Summary of study 2

This second study presented the findings from the semi-structured interviews carried out with a sample of final year undergraduate students who were considering making the transition into PGT study. The transcripts of the interviews were coded, grouped into aggregated categories, themes and first order codes using thematic analysis.

The undergraduate student respondents were asked to consider the main motivational factors that were leading them to consider undertaking PGT study, their choice of university and PGT programme. The students mentioned that their own personal interests were the main the reasons

for considering transitioning into in a particular subject area at PGT level. This is because they had become interested in certain areas after studying other subjects at bachelors' level or they wanted to gain a deeper insight into a particular subject. They also felt that it would be a good way to meet new people and gain new skills and knowledge. Undertaking a PGT programme was considered by the UG students as a gateway into future career possibilities or business opportunities in specialist areas.

The students felt that the university brand was a known commodity and linked with having a good reputation in the minds of the UG students both UK based and overseas. They also expressed that the triple accreditation was an important reputational factor which would attract students. For some students their previous experience with the university was an important deciding factor. Their familiarity with the institution and past satisfaction with their experience of it, influenced their commitment and loyalty to the university and therefore they would remain at the university for their PGT studies.

In terms of influences on their PGT choices, it is important to note that family, friends, past lecturers and tutors can all play an important role in guiding UG graduates towards suitable PGT programmes, particularly through WOM recommendation. Early contact is also important to establish with UG students considering applying for PGT study. The students expected to have regular updates from the university to make them feel welcome and to prepare them for their programmes. The provision of prompt and detailed programme information on module content and the learning and teaching approaches favoured, should also be made available via the university's website and/or videos with Open Day details, links to Programme Directors and module specifications.

The programme fees were important influences on UG students' choices and motivations to transition onto PGT study. The 20% loyalty discount in fees for existing UG students together with the lower living costs of Birmingham, particularly when compared with London, was an important motivator for remaining with the university. However, some UG students were motivated to build upon their previous learning or their work-based experiences by doing a master's level programme later on.

Most of the UG students had rather mixed feelings about the prospect of commencing their PGT studies, however. Some students (particularly overseas students) expressed a fear of failure or of letting their families down. The UG students mostly felt that they were prepared and ready to undertake the transition although they felt that that PGT study would be a challenge for them academically and that they would need to work hard in order to be successful. They were overwhelmingly positive in about their ability to able to take on the challenge, however. As they saw it, PGT study would constitute a focused and intense learning experience that would appear to be a

big step up in terms of level of difficulty and challenge and with possibly only limited support provided.

The UG respondents felt the skills they would be able to improve via a PGT qualification included critical analysis, confidence, communication, leadership, teamwork, planning and time management skills. Their knowledge development would, of course, depend on the specific subject area they were studying. They expected that obtaining a PGT qualification would add a good deal of value by providing them with opportunities to gain employment in a particular specialist field. One of the major reasons they stated they wanted to undertake a PGT qualification, was to differentiate themselves in the jobs market from other students who had also graduated with a bachelor's degree.

 The UG students felt that establishing a good rapport and relationships, both with each other and tutors early on, was a critical factor in terms of support and networking. Being part of a learning community (or CoP) and networking were seen by most to be very important vehicles for support once they joined a PGT programme and in terms of moving on into the future. Students said that social events and activities offered by the university's societies and clubs would be beneficial in helping them to get to know one another and to form friendships, working relationships and networks. Students expected that PGT study would be an opportunity for them establish links with students from other cultures and backgrounds. They felt it would expose them to a diversity of culture and languages and felt that that this would be beneficial in terms of their PGT experience.

The UG students said that they thought their personal professional identities would be enhanced by undertaking a PGT qualification and that having achieved the qualification, it would make them feel good about themselves, providing them with a sense of pride and accomplishment. They also thought that their self-confidence and self-esteem would grow as a result of making the transition to PGT study.

The UG respondents mostly felt that the same support services would be available to them once they were PGT students. However, it appears that some of them would require encouragement to make use of the support offered. They understood that the library and LDC offered comprehensive learner support, however. Some students said that they might feel awkward about asking for help.

Not all UG students were aware of the tailored careers support available to PGT students. Some students thought that although the support they received from their lecturers was good at UG level, they felt it might not be the same at PGT level.

Some UG student respondents commented that it would be most helpful if more information about PGT programmes could be provided by alumni about their own PGT experiences and the 'usefulness'

of doing a PGT programme. This could help them in deciding whether a PGT programme was the right choice for them.

5.3 Findings: Study 3

The third study involved collecting interview data from a purposive sample of 14 PGT student respondents in November 2018. This data was collected a year after the students from studies 1 and 2 and, although most of the questions remained the same there are some new questions incorporated into this study with regard to university location, the PGT learning experience, PGT learning environment and post PGT services. No students were involved in more than one study. Please refer to Appendix 3 for details of the individual participants.

Table 5.4. Summary of themes from study 3 data

	Category codes	Transition Phase	Second order themes	First order concepts
1.	**Personal motivations and influences affecting choice**	Moving in Phase (Pre-transition)	A. Interest in subject area	1. Personal interest 2. Self-development 3. Specialism
			B. Choice of university	4. University reputation and branding (Research/teaching) 5. Previous experience of university 6. Family, Peer or tutor influences 7. Open days, application process & information quality
			C. Choice of programme	8. Costs, financing PGT studies and location 9. Building on existing knowledge 10. Previous work experience

	Category codes	Transition Phase	Second order themes	First order concepts
2.	**Expectations and experiences of PGT programmes and their value**	Moving Through Phase (Situation)	D. Expectations of PGT	1. Feelings about PGT 2. Importance of preparation 3. Challenges of PGT
			E. Programme experiences & activities	4. Learning activity 5. Self-direction & autonomy 6. Group work 7. Assessment 8. Feedback
			F. Adding value	9. Skills and knowledge development 10. Future employability 11. Differentiation
3.	**Relationship building approaches**	Moving Through Phase (Support)	F. Networking	1. Relationships 2. Learning community
			H. Events	3. Social events 4. Culture & language
4.	**Identity and personal changes**	Moving Through Phase (Self)	I. Identity	1. Personal & professional identity 2. Self-confidence & esteem

	Category codes	Transition Phase	Second order themes	First order concepts
5.	**Programme services and organisation**	Moving Through Phase (Support)	J. Learner support	1. Programme organisation & timetabling 2. Dedicated office support 3. Library & LDC 4. Careers support 5. Tutor support
			K. Additional facilities	6. PGT learning environment 7. PGT social spaces 8. IT and other facilities
6.	**Post university services**	Moving Out Phase (Graduation)	J. Post university services	1. Alumni services 2. Post PGT career services 3. Post PGT experiences

5.3.1 Moving in (pre-transition) phase - Personal motivations and influences affecting choices

Following a review of the academic literature on PGT student transition outlined in Chapter 2 and relating specifically to section 2.4 on the "moving in" phase, this first section of the study seeks to uncover the personal motivations and influences on the choices of students in undertaking the transition to PGT study. The overarching aggregated code of personal motivations and influences affecting choices considers student responses in relation to the following areas was grouped into themes (A, B and C) underpinned by first order concepts.

5.3.1.1 Interest in subject area (Theme A)

Second order theme A groups the first order concepts together thus: Personal interest, Self-development and Specialism.

A1. Personal interest

The examples from the student respondents below, show that they had a real personal interest in learning all about a particular subject area in order to gain a deeper understanding of it. For some it was a new subject area that had not been studied before.

> Respondent GS (EU student) had interest in gaining deeper knowledge into management and strategy area, *"The main reason to do the SIB programme is to get a deeper insight into management and its requirements but also because strategy is an area that personally interests me."*
>
> Respondent ZY (Overseas student) said*, "I personally wanted to know what marketing it was all about, and how it works. I became very interested in finding out about it. So, as it's completely a new area for me, I didn't know anything or what the programme would be like... I know more about what marketing is now. We went from basic knowledge and then into it deeper, step-by-step."*

The provision of "conversion" PGT programmes by HEIs that allow students to change of subject area to another at master's level is very beneficial for students in terms of opening up new career opportunities.

A2. Self-development

The student respondents felt that undertaking PGT study in a particular subject area that may be very different to that of their UG degree could be helpful in gaining employment opportunities in certain specialist areas.

Respondent XB (Overseas student) had undertaken an Environmental Engineering bachelor's degree and had embarked upon the MSc in Strategic Marketing Management, *"I think I wanted to differentiate myself, do something different and develop myself as much as possible in this business area, that was my reasoning."*

Respondent ZY (Overseas student) decided to undertake the Strategy and International Business programme because "*I want to develop myself as an overseas business and management consultant and the programme offers me that opportunity*".

Personal development can for some PGT students be an important motivational factor for undertaking the programme. This needs to be highlighted and communicated in the university's marketing communications.

A3. Specialism

Some students want a more specialist and focussed master's programme, having already completed a broader based bachelor's degree. Others want a broader based master's programme having already completed a specialist UG degree.

Respondent JL (Local home student) felt "*my bachelor's degree in Business and Management was pretty much broad based. We got an overview of everything but it was not very specialised. I wanted to get into something more specialised and focused which the MSc in Strategy and International Business is*".

Respondent RU (Local home student) on the other hand thought, *"I decided I wanted to do master's because I wanted to broaden my knowledge because my undergraduate Marketing programme was very specialised. I wanted something a bit broader to widen my perspectives. I think the International Business masters will do that"*.

PGT students often fall into these categories, so it is important that both very specialist PGT programmes and more broad-based ones are available to them.

5.3.1.2 Choice of university (Theme B)

This second order theme groups together the following concepts: University reputation, Previous experience of university, Family/peer/tutor influences and Open days, applications and information

B4. University reputation (rankings and accreditation)

The student responses below were typical of the overall responses related to the university's overall reputation, rankings, triple accreditation and reputation for graduate employability and teaching and learning.

Respondent ST (Home student) stated that *"It was X's reputation for teaching and learning, that was one reason for choosing it. I always heard good things about its reputation"*

Respondent MF (EU student) felt it influenced her final decision too, *"it did help me in terms of you know, knowing that okay it's quite a prestigious university here, it's recognised and it's world-ranked, it made me more confident"*.

Respondent ZY (Overseas student) thought that *"X has a famous Business School, we heard about it in China. It has a good reputation there for being focused on employability. It has decent rankings and it has the triple accreditation"*

These factors can be deemed to be important influencing factors on student's choice of university. Whilst none of the student respondents mentioned the importance of research excellence for their choice of institution, its teaching excellence (TEF Gold) and reputation for graduate employability were considered to be substantial influencing factors. It is clearly important that the university continues to maintain its rankings and accreditations as these affect its global reputation.

B5. Previous experience of university

The students' prior satisfactory experience with the university was key to the decision to remain there to complete a master's programme. In addition, whether the students were local was also an important influencing factor for them to remain at the university.

Respondent JL (Local Home student) completed his bachelor's degree at X, *"I did Business and Management here, I wanted to continue here because I enjoyed my undergraduate experience here, the lecturers were supportive and because I live locally. I have family commitments so I cannot travel too far to university for my postgraduate studies."*

Respondent RU (Local Home student) had also undertaken his first degree at X, "*I wanted to stick with the familiar for the postgraduate year. I didn't want to a new place that I might not enjoy. I am used to X and I like it here".*

It appears that many who enjoy their UG experience remain loyal and committed to the university they know and trust. They prefer to remain at the HEI rather than go to a new, unknown HEI for their PGT studies.

B6. Family, peer and tutor influences

The importance of recommendations from family and friends was reported by several respondents. WOM recommendations can be extremely important in informing student choice of university and PGT programme. WOM recommendations can be seen to be far more credible sources of information than trusting university "paid for" advertisements and other promotions.

> A good example came from Respondent LJ (Overseas student) who said, *"Basically the Embassy said no to going for Y University, that's because I'm fully sponsored. So basically, me and my husband were searching for universities in Birmingham and he told me that X University is very good in business."*
>
> Respondent ML (EU student) explained that relatives informed his choice, *"For the final choice I was between X and a couple of others in the UK specifically. And what would make me choose X over the others was word of mouth of some of my relatives whose kids had already studied in UK, postgraduate and undergraduate."*

In these two examples above, it can be seen that family members and spouses can be strong WOM influencers in students' choice of university.

> Respondent ST (Home student) felt that friends were important WOM influencers, *"W University wasn't very good in terms of its administration, in terms of looking after students and their wellbeing. And just their academic development, I felt that they weren't very helpful. A few of my friends said to me, who study here, they said to me X University is quite helpful, especially the Business School, so I definitely recommend you look into it more into detail. And they just gave really good feedback about it."*

WOM recommendations from peers and tutors can be very important influencers for students in terms of choosing the specific programme and university to attend.

> Respondent XB (Overseas student) thought that agent recommendations were important alongside the advice of a tutor from back home, *"Almost all Chinese students they go to university through an agent. I think this is part of the reason I came to X and the other part is the recommendation from my agency. Also because of my teacher, my undergraduate teacher who graduated from L, she suggested about four schools, one of them was X."*

For overseas students, agents from students' home countries can also play an important influencing role.

B7. Open days, applications and information

The student respondents highlighted the importance of good communications when considering applying to the university. These communications can include face to face meetings with admissions staff or programme Directors, Open day visits, email or using the website.

> Respondent MF (EU student) explained that she had, *"booked an appointment with Admissions Office and had a few meetings with staff and went through the programmes I would be interested in. They were super helpful and I decided to do the programme because of this".*
>
> Respondent TL (Overseas student) seemed clear about what he needed to do, *"I have not yet entered my application because I need to get references sorted. I went to the Open Day and it sounded a very good programme. Visiting the university and finding out first-hand about the programme really helped me to decide that this was what I wanted. "*

Communications are a vital element in informing prospective students about the university and its programmes. A good website is important in order that students can quickly and easily find all the information about the university and programmes they will need.

> For Respondent GS (EU student), use of the website was very important tool for information, *"Everything was online. I found out what I needed though online research."*

However, emails from a programme team or meetings and other contact with Programme Directors can help in forging bonds with students at an early stage.

> For Respondent AV (EU student), meeting the Programme Director was invaluable in helping to build an early bond, *"I met with the Programme Director and it was very useful. He went into great depth, explained to me a lot. So, what struck me was that he was giving me a lot of examples, practical examples, relating the programme with my work experience."*

The importance of supplying detailed and timely information to students seems critical when they are making decisions about whether to apply to a university. This will assist in building an early bond and relationship with prospective PGT students.

5.3.1.3 Choice of programme (Theme C)

Under this second order theme C, the following first order concepts are grouped: Costs, financing PGT study and location, building on work experience and Building on existing knowledge.

C8. Costs, Financing PGT study and location

For some students the introduction of the PGT loan was an important factor influencing whether or not they would decide to undertake PGT studies. Not all students had parents who were willing to pay for another year at university, however some were still supported by their parents who were willing to pay the PGT fees.

> Respondent RU (Local home student) had taken out a student loan and explained that his parents were pleased that they did not have to pay for his fees, *"my parent's reaction was, no, not another year but at least we don't have to pay for it. A loan was the only way I was going to be able to afford the fees. I couldn't do an MSc without it. I know it's more debt but I think it will pay off for me in the end in terms of a better job."*
>
> Respondent MF (EU student) however had financial support from her parents, "*I'm lucky that my parents are still willing to fund me for another year or two. Without their support I would not have done a masters."*

Other students felt that the level of fees were a factor. As the university was able to offer 20% loyalty discounts to former UG students, this was seen as an important factor for choosing it and its programmes. Other universities were felt to be more expensive, either based in the local area or in other UK cities. For some overseas students in particular, the living costs in Birmingham were also a factor that affected their choice.

> Respondent JL (Local home student) said*. "I also applied to university T; it had a good programme too but they rejected me. I think the fees maybe were the same as X's. X had the 20% discount I could claim though."*
>
> Respondent MF (EU student) thought*, "Which are the best universities for that programme? And that's why I picked X because it was not too expensive."*
>
> Respondent TL (Overseas student) felt*, "And like I had choices in London, also in Birmingham, in Newcastle and maybe five or six universities. But I think that the most important factor that affected my choice is the price. I think that maybe living costs… not study cost because study doesn't cost so much but living in London is a high cost."*

For other students the location of the university campus was a key factor affecting their choice. This is important for locally based students. It was felt to be a safe campus according to both home based and overseas students.

> Respondent TL (Overseas student) also said*, "The location is important. If I choose to study in London maybe I don't like such busy environments or for it to be so crowded but also not so far from the city centre. So, I think X is a better choice for me. It should be somewhere cosmopolitan and business heavy but safer. In London I thought it would be more dangerous."*
>
> Respondent JL (Local home student) also said, *"The main thing that made me decide to come here was like obviously the location, my kind of family circumstances and the cost as well. The campus is nice, near the city centre and it is safe too."*

The costs of the PGT programmes, the cost of living in Birmingham the offer of a 20% loyalty discount to former UG students and the availability of student loans were all factors that aided students in their choice of PGT programme.

C9. Building on existing knowledge

Some students felt motivated to build on and further develop their knowledge and skills and specialise in particular areas of business. The students felt they needed to focus on specific areas that would help them to gain future employment as managers or to start up their own businesses.

> Respondent JL (Local home student) said, "*I wanted to do this master's programme (SIB) because I did a BSc in Business and Management and enjoyed doing the Strategic Management module in my undergraduate final year at X. So, I thought I would do something to do with strategy. It's a subject I hope will help me gain a management role in future*".
>
> Respondent XB (Overseas student) explained, "*I did a bachelor's degree in Environmental Engineering back home in China which was good but I need to gain some business knowledge and skills to support this.*
>
> Respondent RU (Overseas student) had gained a business degree in China but, "*I would like to know more about marketing strategies and operational skills because I plan to go into business as my career in future. I want to build and improve my knowledge*"

The students were keen to set up their own business ventures or to become managers in industry, feeling that the development of business skills would support their future career aspirations.

C10. Previous work experience

Some students expressed that they were building on their work experience by undertaking a master's programme. They felt that they could develop further by undertaking the programme and felt that studying overseas and experiencing other environments and cultures would be beneficial.

> Respondent MF (Overseas student) explained that she," *had been working for several years before coming here. I decided to go with marketing in terms of all the subjects I could have taken. I spoke with my boss and she thought that I would be best suited to a marketing role. It would be a good fit with the role I had been doing in China in sales*".
>
> Respondent TL (Overseas student) said, "*I haven't just graduated I have been working for two years in a company. It's like a multiple transition process for me! I found that when I started working it was OK but I didn't have clear career targets in mind. So, I thought, with my parents' agreement, that I should go to a foreign environment to study more, build on my work experience and improve my communication and other skills.*"

It is important that the previous work experiences of some PGT students are acknowledged by their tutors and used within the classroom setting at university. Many have had very interesting job roles, sometimes in an overseas environment, which can bring different perspectives into classroom discussions and group tasks.

5.3.2 Moving through transition (situation) phase - Expectations, experiences and value of PGT studies

Based on the review of the transition literature considered in Chapter 2, section 2.5, this section of the case study seeks to explore the expectations, experiences and perceptions of value of PGT studies in the "moving through" situational phase of transition to PGT studies. Under this general, aggregated code, expectation, experiences and value of PGT study links together several main themes (D, E and F) together with underpinning groups of first order concepts, explores students' expectations and preparations for PGT study.

5.3.2.1 Preparations for and expectations of PGT studies (Theme D)

Theme D links together first order concepts to include: Feelings about PGT, Importance of preparation and Challenges of PGT study

D1. Feelings about PGT

Unfortunately, many students really do not know what to expect when they start a PGT programme. This can lead to feelings of anxiety and uncertainty for students. Students have to go through a period of adaptation and adjustment.

> Respondent GS (EU student) said*, "I was not really sure what was expected of me at the start to be honest, not really. "Yes, actually I felt anxious I was still adapting. I'm like quite settled down now. The whole first term I am still going to be like adapting a bit, so eventually in the second term I'm going to be like, relaxed and sure".*
>
> Respondent MF (EU student) simply said*, "I am still trying to get my head around what I am expected to do, even though I have been here for a couple of months".*

The period of adjustment and settling in which can take a prolonged period of time. The sense of anxiety and uncertainty students feel could be supported through early communications and by developing a trusting relationship with the HEI.

D2. Importance of preparation

The students who undertake a pre-master's or pre-sessional programme at the university feel better prepared to start their PGT programmes because this is exactly what these programmes are designed to do. Those students who do not take these programmes are less well prepared but do try to undertake some preparation themselves.

Some of the students felt they were well prepared for PGT study by undertaking a pre-master's or a pre-sessional programme before the PGT programme. As Respondent TL (Overseas student) explains, "*I studied on a pre-master's programme in London for a year. It was important because it did prepare me well, to know what to expect with assessments and the UK style of learning*".

Respondent ZY (Overseas student) completed a pre-sessional programme. He says, "*I did the pre-sessional course at X for 12 weeks. We are much better prepared and know how to cite, write assignments and give a presentation etc. The pre-sessional course was very, very useful preparation*."

Respondent ST (Home student) said, "*I wasn't really too sure what was coming, I had some idea from looking online as to what we would be studying. I read through as much material and books as I could to try to prepare for the start of the programme, I was as ready as I could be. I'm glad I did this but felt the university could have sent me some pre-reading or information to do to guide me.*"

It would be beneficial if all students were better prepared for their PGT programmes. This could be established during early contact and could take the form of starter packs for PGT programmes. These packs could provide some prereading or other materials to help students understand the type of activities and content that the programme would cover.

D3. Challenges of PGT study

The students were candid in explaining that there were some challenges to be faced when undertaking PGT study. Overseas students explained that they had to get used to very different systems compared to those in their home country's universities, use of different pedagogy and learning in English, a second language for them. Transition can also be challenging for home-based students too, however.

Respondent ML (EU student) said, "*It's actually … well it's very different from the Greek system, from the information and communities. For me it was difficult, when you do an MSc it was a challenge at first. It still is but not so much now, I get used to it*".

Respondent MG (EU student) felt, "*Well at the beginning it was a little weird because here you have a completely different organisation and system from Italy. So, at the beginning I had to try to understand how everything works because I couldn't be here for the induction week*".

It is important that PGT students have access to and are aware of the support on offer and that they do access it early on. Time needs to be taken to 'learn the ropes' so students can become familiar with the systems and processes of the university. This can be achieved during the induction period. Some students will be unfamiliar with the learning and teaching approaches so sufficient time must be given for them to assimilate new ways of working.

5.3.2.2 Programme experiences and activities (Theme E)

Under theme E the following concepts are grouped together: Learning activity, Self-direction and autonomy, Group work, Assessments, and Feedback.

E4. Learning activity

In this section the respondents reported on their learning activities. They found the pace to be very fast and intense which was not always easy. However, they were coping with it.

> Respondent GS (EU student) said, *"I wasn't expecting the pace to be like this. At the start I was expecting to be kind of like slower and everything to be more detailed you know. Not like from this, then we go on to the next project and then the next thing, to establish that. But I guess that's the life of a master's student."*
>
> Respondent LT (Overseas student) thought, **"***I did find it intense and a lot to do but I am getting used to it and trying to get through it because there's a lot of reading to do."*

Perhaps the pace of the programme could start off at a slower pace that gradually pick up over the period the programme runs. This would help students to settle into their programmes better and they would feel less stressed and more satisfied with the service they were receiving.

> Respondent LJ (Overseas student) said, "*I kind of enjoy many lectures actually because the tutors, come right up to me and say if you don't understand just come and ask me. I think my face shows my confusion. Actually, they are very good and so supportive. Our tutor puts like tutorials or videos and he says please watch this or read this before you come to the class to prepare."*
>
> Respondent RL (Overseas student) said, "*The lecture experience is very nice here and interesting. I learned such a lot from the tutors."*
>
> Respondent TL (Overseas student) explained, "*The tutors are eager to answer my questions. And also find it's comfortable to listen to them because they encourage us to ask questions and be critically thinking about what he or she has said. I feel it's really interesting. Also, the fresh feeling I feel here is really motivating for me, to listen to the tutors carefully."*

Overall, the students reported feeling satisfied with their lecturer's performance in class, this included knowledge of their subject and students, their supportive and encouraging nature. The students felt that their professionalism stood out which helped students to stay motivated and engaged with their learning.

E5. Self-direction and autonomy

Some students felt that their UG degree had prepared them to be independent and self-directed learners because that was what they had experienced before. These students tended to be UK based

students. The overseas students on the other hand felt that number of contact hours with tutors was low because there was an expectation that students would be more self-directed in their studies. Students from China felt that there was an expectation in the UK for autonomous learning at PGT level, which was not the case in China, where a more didactic form of pedagogy was prevalent.

Respondent ST (Home student) said, *"There's not really more independent learning, just because I feel that when I was doing my UG degree in Philosophy and Literature there was a lot of reading anyway. So, it doesn't feel any different now when I go to the library and make sure that I get all the readings in."*

Respondent MF (EU student) was surprised, *"I don't know. I just expected a lot more contact hours but I do now understand why we don't get as many hours, just because like you need your own time to do independent study."*

Respondent ZY (Overseas student) said, "*Here is a different teaching system to China where the tutor told us that you should do this and this and this. But in the UK the tutor asks you to discover it and read some references and you can make your own result and finish the task on your own."*

Many non-European, international students are not used to self-directed, autonomous learning approaches, where the focus is on student rather the teacher. Whilst some students do enjoy the sense of self directedness, others have problems in making the adjustment to the demands of this style of learning.

E6. Assessment

Students were asked about their expectations with regards to assessment for PGT programmes. Overall, they explained that they knew what to expect, either from their induction or pre-sessional programmes, they were aware that a mix of various forms of assessment would be used.

Respondent LT (Overseas student) said, *"I knew from the induction week and also from my friends that you know, the current modules would be assessed in different kind of ways. There are some that would be assessed by examination and some in the form of coursework, individual coursework."*

Respondent ZY (Overseas student) said, *"I knew about the assessments because I was a pre-sessional and we had done some before. Some freshers they just came in September so they are not so sure. We talked a lot and they don't know how to do a presentation or a poster assessment."*

Some students were sometimes not always sure of the assessment requirements on their programmes. Other students reported on the timing of assessments for PGT programmes and were happy that these fell due during the period before the holidays.

Respondent GS (EU student) felt very uncertain, *"I'm not sure for example how much is that 50% to pass the exam, I'm not sure like how much is that, like how much work do professors require for this 50%? How much writing, how much correct information or how much academic writing? Because I don't know the boundaries of 50%. So, I emailed and said I am a bit concerned about the exam, can you tell me where I can find the past papers and also what's the structure of the exam likely to be. What are you expecting us to be able to do?"*

Respondent MG (EU student) however was happy, *"I think it's quite clear and I think it's good because in Italy we have all the assessments after Christmas. So, the holidays weren't really holidays and you had to study all the time because you know, the first week back was the exams."*

It is critical that students are clear about what is expected of them with regard to assessment. Tutors need to ensure that past papers are made available and deadlines are not bunched together. Access to support should be available and communicated to students in good time before assessments are due.

E7. Group work

The student respondents outlined some of the issues they were experiencing with group work. The following comments were typical.

Respondent MG (EU student) felt that, *"Sometimes, in some seminar groups, it's difficult to work because the others just don't communicate to you and you can't communicate with them because maybe they don't understand what you are saying. A language issue and a cultural issue I think."*

Respondent TL (Overseas student) was positive about working with others, *"It's a really good chance for us to practice our communication skills and also for team spirit development. "*

Respondent JL (Local home student) said, *"Well there's some lecturers they do like to encourage you to all work together in collaboration on different subjects. Some of the lecturers do encourage this kind of culture or approach with students."*

The use of group work is well accepted on the whole and it helps to prepare students for their future business-related careers. However, some students do find it difficult to participate in mixed cultural groups. Support with language should be provided where necessary but overall, it seems that students do benefit from the experience and it can be a source of satisfaction for most students.

E8. Feedback

The responses below were typical of the views held by student respondents in this study. The students felt that there could be more clarity not only about assessments but also the way in which feedback could be delivered.

> Respondent XB (Overseas student) said, "*I've been told how I will be examined but not about the feedback. For me I think having face-to-face feedback is better.*"
>
> Respondent ST (Home student) said, "*First of all I feel that I'd like more feedback because there are some assessments that do give me feedback but some that don't. I appreciate that it is difficult, especially when exam based. So, I emailed the tutor and he just explained this is why you didn't get the grade but I still wasn't happy about it. In general, I do feel that I would like more feedback from the exams because it's quite generic, they look at the mark scheme and they say you haven't done this or that, but they don't offer any suggestions.*"

Some students felt that they would like to have more personalised, detailed and/or face to face feedback particularly on their exam performance.

5.3.2.3 Adding value (Theme F)

Under theme F, the first order concepts are grouped thus: Skills and Knowledge development, Future employability and Differentiation.

F9. Skills and knowledge development

In speaking about skills and knowledge development, the students mentioned how the PGT programme would help in developing their confidence, group work, planning and time management skills in particular. They were also keen to develop subject specialist skills, depending on the business programme they were taking and the career path they wished to follow.

> Respondent ML (EU student) thought that her confidence in public speaking was an important skill to be developed alongside specialist knowledge of sales and advertising, "*The skills I really want to build on are to do with my confidence. I really want to improve my ability to do public speaking. I have always found this a bit daunting. In terms of knowledge I want to learn about marketing, particularly about sales and advertising. These topic areas have always interested me.*"
>
> Respondent RU (Local student) thought that time management would be important to improve, "*In terms of skill set development, I think my time management will improve as I think the year will be an intense one with lots to do and hopefully my group work skills will also be better. In addition to this I think my ability to plan will be tested.*"

It important that students understand the types of skills and knowledge they will be developing during their PGT programmes and that support is available to them to do this.

F10. Future employability

Perceived future employment opportunities are one of the key reasons why students decide to undertake PGT study. They felt that further knowledge and skills development will help them to secure a good job and that employers would value a master's qualification more highly than an

undergraduate degree. For overseas students the ability to improve their English language skills and to study in a foreign country would be beneficial.

> Respondent MG (EU student) felt, "*I wanted to do the PG programme because I knew that I was in lacking in marketing research or economic skills. So, I needed to get more into business. I thought that studying a Master's in English, could be very good for my career because marketing is international and it's very important to know English.*"
>
> Respondent RU (Local student) said, "*From what I've heard from some of my friends, they've said that they've had a bit more luck with grad jobs, or any jobs with a Master's. Employers know it's a postgraduate qualification and it sets you above the rest a little bit. It's got weight to it. So, I haven't got any experience myself yet to confirm that but I'd hope that it gives me a similar result.*"

F11. Differentiation

The respondents below felt that having a UK based PGT qualification would help to "differentiate" them from applicants for jobs who do not hold such a qualification.

> Respondent LJ (Overseas student) felt, "*If we compare the degrees especially master's from UK or from my home country, basically the UK degree is going to be number one. So, if I went back there and if I had a degree from the UK and another one was applying for the same job had a degree from Saudi Arabia, they will pick me. I think a PG degree from … especially in business, from the UK, it's like I'm gold!*"
>
> Respondent RU (Home student) said, "*I think it has more of a kind of a prestigious aspect to it. I think the undergraduate degree is kind of what everyone has nowadays, to be fair. You can get an undergraduate in anything. I think when you've done a postgraduate degree, it just gives you that little bit of a step up above others.*"
>
> Respondent RL (Overseas student) said, "*A master's degree here represents good value for the money. I think the value of the degree is bigger than the payment I paid for the postgraduate fees.*"

The UK PGT degree was perceived as having some prestige in the employment market. Overseas students felt that it bestowed a greed deal of value upon the qualification holder above the cost of paid for it. Students felt it would set them apart from others with "only" an UG degree, that many now have and it would differentiate them in the employment market.

5.3.3 Moving through transition (strategies) phase - Relationship building approaches

In this section of the 'moving through' phase aspects relates to the relationship building approaches outlined in the academic literature review in Chapter 2, section 2.6, on the strategies aspect of transition to PGT studies. RM aspects provide support to transitioning PGT students through the development of coping strategies to deal with, control, avoid, or prevent stressful situations. This

overarching category code draws together the second order themes, G and H, Networking and Events which are underpinned by first order concepts.

5.3.3.1 Networking (Theme G)

Under this second order theme G, the first order concepts grouped together are: Socialisation processes and Learning community.

G1. Socialisation processes

The respondents reported in this section the importance of building a trusting relationship and rapport with their tutors. They felt the relationships between tutors and students were friendly and positive.

> According to Respondent ML (EU student) it was possible to build a rapport and relationship with tutors over time, *"Although every lecturer has his own or her own characteristics, like type of lecture and how you proceed. I think as we build a relationship with them it's going to be better over time. So, I think it's going to be good. I have built up a good rapport and a good relationship with them."*
>
> This was echoed by Respondent RL (Overseas student) who reported building rapport with staff in a similar fashion, *"About the professors and teachers, they treat the students outside the class like friends* so *maybe it is a good way to build a relationship*, t*o build a rapport between teachers and students."*

Students felt that they could establish good relationships and rapport with their tutors**.** They felt this was a positive situation.

G2. Learning Community

The respondents explained that they did feel it was important to become part of the learning community but it was something that it was up to them to manage themselves. They felt that it was a friendly and supportive environment with good community spirit but it took time. It wasn't always easy for learning community to be established because some students felt shy.

> Respondent GS (EU student) felt that building a learning community was up to the individual student, *"I don't think that depends on the university. It's more individual … you should find a group to socialise with and build up your sense of community."*
>
> Some students felt that it was easy to make new friends with other students, *"I don't know about others but I find myself quite surprisingly getting along with new students very well, I think. To be honest because previously I was quite an introverted person but here, I made a lot of friends and international friends. We have a good community spirit here together; we help each other out with our learning."* Respondent LT (Overseas student).
>
> Respondent AV (EU student) found it a bit more difficult but that it was important to try, *"I think that it was very difficult at the beginning to get along with the other students. The first week was very useful to get to*

> *know each other a bit better. It was true and we get along and support each other well. So, I think that it's more up to us to build our learning community."*

The development of a learning community can be very beneficial strategy in establishing friendship and support groups during a period of transition.

5.3.3.2 Events (Theme H)

Under the second order theme H, the following first order themes are grouped: Social events and Culture and language.

H3. Social events

The student respondents felt that there were plenty of events that were for PGT students to help them get to know one another, which they mostly enjoyed but some students felt there were too many and that they took up too much time. However, it was also felt that more students should try to participate in them.

> Respondent LT (Overseas student) said, "*There are a lot of events and fairs, that sort of thing put on for PG students. I really wanted to attend a lot of them, all of them, but it was just like too much for me. Took up too much time. And I kind of feel the FOMO, the fear of missing out. But I would love to make more international friends to understand more about European students. So maybe some cultural activities would be good.*"
>
> Respondent LJ (Overseas student) said, "*They have sent us details of lots of events. Many events, like to come speak with the Dean or come meet and greet, there were actually two meet and greets for the postgraduates and I thought that was really nice.*"
>
> Respondent ST (Home student) thought, "*I know that you made events for postgrads but I don't think as many people go to them as they should, probably just because they feel nervous to interact with others. I wish I went along to make more friends and know more people and network. But I think it was the way it was just sent through email, there was a meet and greet, I just didn't see it as a priority*".

Some students felt there was a degree of shyness or nervousness about attending events but that they should be compulsory because it was a good opportunity to meet other students, make friends and avoid potential loneliness. It can however be a bit daunting for them.

H4. Culture and language

The respondents felt as though PGT students make more of an effort to communicate with each other because they have all been at university before and are all in the same situation together.

> Respondent RU (Local student) said that communications with other PGT students was easier, *"I feel like when you're a postgraduate, people make a little bit more effort to speak to one another because they've had the experience of undergraduate, which kind of emphasises trying to put yourself out there a little bit. I think people in postgraduate, like, appreciate that a bit more and they just kind of put themselves out there. Because there's a lot of people in similar shoes in that they perhaps won't know many others."*
>
> Respondent TL (Overseas student) found that some Chinese students preferred to communicate with others in Chinese but that students from other backgrounds were happy to help, *"Maybe the Chinese students, some of them are not eager to speak English with other students who come from China because they feel more comfortable to speak Chinese. But most of others they are really friendly and especially when we are doing the teamwork, they are willing to offer some support for us because we are international students, we may not be familiar with the culture, so they help us."*

Even though some overseas students might be a bit shy or uncomfortable to speak in English at first because naturally, they feel more comfortable in speaking in their own language with other overseas students, given time and practice they can be encouraged to do so. Most of the student body are friendly and supportive towards each other and want to help.

5.3.4 Moving through transition (self) phase - Identity and personal changes

This section relates to the notion of 'self' relating who the student is, their identity, personal and psychological characteristics during the transition process. This overarching category code reports on the second order theme, I on Identity changes, which is underpinned by first order concepts.

5.3.4.1 Identity changes (Theme I)

Under this second order theme I, the concepts grouped together are: Personal and professional identity and Self confidence and self-esteem.

I1. Personal and professional identity

Students commented positively on the personal and professional changes to their identity that were being affected by the PGT programme and that this was a positive process.

> Respondent RU (Local student) felt, "*this programme is changing me, I am becoming a more adaptable individual who can work with others better. I am more well-rounded person than before; I can sell myself better."*
>
> Respondent MF (EU student) said," *I do feel like I am changing personally, gearing myself up more for the world of work. This is a good step up, applying my learning to industry. Becoming a professional.*"

These changes included feeling more adaptable, well rounded, becoming more professional and the ability to "sell" themselves better in the workplace.

I2. Self-confidence and self esteem

The respondents that their self-confidence had been positively affected by being on the PGT programme and that this also affected their self-esteem in a positive way too.

> Respondent ZY (Overseas student) felt her confidence was growing whilst on the PGT programme,*" I am definitely already more confident… I feel that I can do everything, I literally can do everything."*
>
> Respondent TL (Overseas student) thought that his confidence was growing on the PGT programme, which was improving his self-esteem. "*I feel like I can approach more people now and push myself to step out of my comfort zone. My confidence is really growing along with my communication skills. This makes me good about myself."*

Encouragement of PGT students to become more confident and improving their self-esteem thereby shaping their academic and professional identities, this will help students to adopt more salient identities leading to successful attitudes and behaviours.

5.3.5 Moving through transition (support) phase - Programme organisation and support services

This section of the study is underpinned by the transition literature outlined in Chapter 2, section 2.8 on the support aspect of the "moving through" phase or support aspect of student transition to PGT study. It aims to explore the importance of learner support and additional facilities for PGT students. This overarching category code draws together the second order themes J and K, Learner support and Additional facilities which are underpinned by first order concepts.

5.3.5.1 Learner support (Theme J)

The second order theme J links together the following first order concepts: Programme organisation, Dedicated office support, Library and LDC, Careers support and Tutor support

J1. Programme organisation

At this time students reported plenty of issues with the electronic timetable. This was a source of great frustration for the students. There were also issues for some students with setting up and finding the correct seminar groups.

> Respondent ML (EU student) found, *"Timetable is one thing that is digital at X, but it has problems that need to be fixed. Like MAP, I downloaded it before I came here, I haven't used it, not even one time because it's not working properly. Especially the timetables and the other features. Another one is with the structure of the organisation, like if you have a problem you go to the Programme Office, the Programme Office sends you to the Hub. The Hub says you have to go to the Programme Office. It reminds me of Greek bureaucracy."*
>
> Respondent LT (Overseas student) also had issues, *"From the start I mean many students that found the timetable, the system in general had some issues. The timetable sometimes could not be accessed."*
>
> Respondent MG (EU student) said, *"There were some problems with the seminar groups, we have some problems for the seminar group of Strategic Management. And as I enrolled later, I had some difficulties to find my group."*

These issues with systems need to be addressed as frustrated students can quickly become dissatisfied ones who may withdraw and/or pass on negative WOM feedback via social media.

J2. Dedicated office support

The respondents reported that some of the administrative issues they experienced could be overcome through the provision of dedicated PGT programme support team. They felt that dedicated staff for PGT programmes would pay more attention to their concerns and interests because some were not being addressed appropriately and required multiple emails and visits to the Programme Office.

> Respondent AV (EU student) felt, "*We need a PG programme office so that they could be more concerned and more aware of the issues that we are involved in. Sometimes we just went to the sixth floor but they couldn't really help us. So, we email, we had to send email again and it's kind of waste of time. We need dedicated staff to look after the interests of postgraduate students.*"
>
> Respondent GS (EU student) said, "*At first I was getting emails from the Postgraduate Admissions, so I thought there was one. Now I know there isn't so it would be more helpful if there is a specific programme team for postgraduates and one specific for undergraduates. There is a lot of information about every student, so it would be easier for everyone.*"

The issues highlighted need to be addressed in order that students' concerns can be remedied. This will help students to feel that they are listened to and will prevent feelings of dissatisfaction with the service provided.

J3. Library and LDC

The respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the services provided by the library and LDC.

> Respondent AV (EU student) said, "*Yesterday I suffer for the first time in my life the numerical tests. I was super-scared because I never heard about it but I knew about maths support, I just popped in the library and they were amazing. Also, the other services have looked after me well too*".
>
> Respondent JL (Local student) said, "*I mean there is the support for like learning resources. If you struggle with referencing or like you can make use of library. And then in library as well they have like learning support available, for academic writing, checking. It's not only for native speakers, for foreign students too. The majority of the students here are unlike me, because English is not their first language*".

The level of learning support on offer was found to be excellent. Support with maths, academic writing and referencing were mentioned as being very helpful. Students reported feeling satisfied with the service provision. More PGT students need to be encouraged to seek out the support offered, however.

J4. Careers support

The respondents were also very satisfied with the careers support provided. They liked the number of careers fairs and networking events held at the university.

> Respondent ML (EU student) is very appreciative of the programme careers support she is receiving, "*I'm very pleased because there are so many careers fairs and there is Mr G, he is very cooperative and informs us every week of events*".
>
> Respondent LT (Overseas student) said there were plenty of events related to careers, "*there are recruitment days, networking events going on here and I receive a lot of information in terms of opportunities*".

The students reported feeling very positive overall about the careers support on offer and were satisfied with the service.

J5 Tutor support

The students were also very positive about the support they received from their tutors. Students reported that tutors were supportive, approachable and interested in them. Tutors were happy to provide clarity about assessments or other issues.

> Respondent JL (Local student) felt, *"I went to see the lecturer just recently and she explained to me obviously what's she is assessing me on and how I am doing so far. I went to see the lecturer about a particular assignment and it was good help."*
>
> Respondent AV (EU student) said, *"I really love the tutor support here because I always see that they are very interested. And if there are any problems you just pop in their room, and they are really helpful. I just had an appointment with my tutor and he was very, very clear."*

The students appeared to be very satisfied with the level of support from their tutors and with the service they provided.

5.3.5.2 Additional facilities (Theme K)

This second order theme K groups the following first order concepts: PGT learning environment, PGT social spaces and IT and other facilities.

K6. PGT Learning environment

In this section the respondents explained that it would be better if PGT students could have their own learning facilities. This would comprise a suite of rooms for PGT students sole use so they would not have to mix with UG students directly.

> Respondent ML (EU student) said, "*The rooms overall are good but some are hard to find. There is just the library, the room which is for postgraduates. It would be worthwhile X investing in a suite of rooms that are specifically for postgraduates. We would know like where to go then and not have to mix with the undergraduates. It's not a bad thing to mix with them as such but to know like which rooms are for you and which ones are for undergraduates. There would be fewer problems with not having suitable rooms for our classes.*"
>
> Respondent TL (Overseas student) explained**,** *"I think that we need to have like more rooms for postgraduates that would be really helpful for us, especially for us as a group, for studying and working as a group."*

They felt these rooms would be more suitable for them as they had to undertake a good deal of group work which could be affected by interruptions by UG students. This could have an adverse consequence on PGT student outcomes.

K7. PGT social spaces

The respondents also felt that they would like to have dedicated meetings spaces or common rooms where they could work on projects or simply socialise together.

> Respondent MG (EU student) thought, *"I only know about a room in the library which is for postgrads. There's no particular room in the main building which is for us. It is a shame. If there was a PG room, I think because maybe there are less people inside, just post grads, you can concentrate more and I think that would*

> *be very useful. You can also meet new friends; new people and it could be a good idea just for socialising with your group."*
>
> Respondent XB (Overseas student) said, *"Maybe a common room might be a good idea for making friends and building relationships with other postgrad students."*

The PGT students don't currently feel as if there is enough workspace for them specifically. Relationship building is a key factor supporting transition, therefore dedicated spaces for PGT students could support this.

K8. IT and other facilities

The students commented favourably about the IT facilities and other services available from the Hub. The ability to borrow laptops and to download software for free were praised.

> Respondent LT (Overseas student) stated *"like when I needed to open a bank account or that sort of thing, the help was very useful here. I got a new laptop and I heard that the IT Helpdesk would help us to install like Microsoft Office for free and that was great. The service is great."*
>
> Respondent LJ (Overseas student) said*, "Actually, I was really impressed that I was able to borrow a laptop to use for my work. From now on I don't need to bring my laptop anymore, I just borrow a laptop. It's perfect!"*

5.3.6 Moving out (graduation) phase - Post university services

In this section, the final transition phase will be considered. This 'moving out' phase culminates with the students successfully completing their studies before moving onto another, new phase of their life. Under this general, aggregated code, post university services, the main theme L will link with underpinning groups of first order concepts.

5.3.6.1 Post- PGT services (Theme L)

Under second order theme L the following first order concepts include: Alumni services, Post PGT career support and Post PGT experiences.

L1. Alumni services

Alumni can be invited to share their experiences with students. Students felt that by networking with alumni they could learn more about how they could make themselves stand out to employers.

> Respondent RL (Overseas student) said he thought, *"You know, what would be one special characteristic for this university is that sometimes, they could invite more business alumni to come to X to share their stories and their work experience with the students. It would be so inspiring"*
>
> Respondent ST (Home Student*)* said, *"I think one of the things that I would have liked to have known is how to approach business leaders, what to ask them, how to make yourself really presentable at interview, when it comes to making yourself really stand out. I think an alumnus from X would be a great idea for this*.*"*

Students felt that they could learn a good deal from university PGT alumni particularly in terms of them providing advice to students on interview technique and presentation.

L2. Post-PGT career support

Most of the students were not clear on the whole about any careers services open to them post PGT graduation. The one student who commented on this below felt it was a very valuable service.

> Respondent ST (Home student) said, *"I think there might be careers talks and sessions given on how to approach companies for when you finish as a postgraduate. There is also some ongoing support available for some years afterwards which is awesome"*.

It is important that all PGT students know about the career services on offer to them once they graduate. It is a valuable service and one that helps to maintain the relationship with graduating students. It is hoped that the students will remain loyal and committed to the university by becoming alumni themselves.

L3. Post PGT experiences

The respondents who answered this question felt that they would be keen to become alumni of the university. They did feel committed to it and its values and wanted to give something back to help other students.

> Respondent AV (EU student) said, *"Becoming an alumna of the university would be my wish. I feel committed to this university and it's always a good opportunity to keep a strong relationship and especially with X because I spend one year here. It's one of the most important years for me. It would be good to give something back."*
>
> Respondent XB (Overseas student) said, *"If I have the chance, I would be glad to have links with the university. I would be happy to help and support other students."*

5.3.7 Summary of Study 3

The third study presented findings from the semi-structured interviews carried out with a second sample of students who had recently transitioned into PGT study, but a year after the first group. This study included some additional topic areas which were not included in the first phase of the study, however. The additional topics included location issues, assessment, group work, feedback, PGT learning environment, facilities and social spaces, post PGT careers support and post PGT experiences. The transcripts of the interviews were coded, grouped into aggregated categories, themes and first order codes using thematic analysis.

The student respondents reported on the mix of motivational factors that led to their choice of university and PGT programmes. The respondents said they had a real personal interest in learning all about a particular subject area in order to gain a deeper understanding of it. For some of them it was a new subject area that had not been studied before. The provision of "conversion" PGT programmes by HEIs that allow students to change of subject area to another at master's level is very beneficial for students in terms of opening up new career opportunities to them. Personal development can be an important motivational factor for undertaking the programme for some students. Some look to undertake a broader based PGT programme whist others require a more specialist programme.

As in the other studies, the students felt that rankings and accreditations achieved by the university were important reputational factors. Whilst none of the student respondents mentioned the importance of research excellence as a factor influencing their choice of institution, teaching excellence (TEF Gold) and the university's reputation for graduate employability were considered to be substantial influencing factors. It was also apparent that those who had prior satisfactory experience with the university had made the decision to remain there to complete their master's programme. In addition, those students who were local found it was an important influencing factor for remaining at the university.

The importance of recommendations from family and friends was reported by several of the respondents. WOM recommendations can be extremely important in informing student choice of university and PGT programme. WOM recommendations were seen to be far more credible sources of information than trusting to university "paid for" advertisements and other promotions. For overseas students, the agents from their home countries can also play an important influencing role in the choice of university and programme. The students also highlighted the importance of good communications when considering applying to the university. These communications can include face to face meetings with admissions staff or programme Directors, Open day visits, email or using the website. The importance of supplying detailed and timely information to students is critical when

they are making decisions about whether to apply to a university. This will assist in building early bonds and relationships with prospective PGT students.

For some students the introduction of the PGT loan was an important factor influencing whether or not they would decide to undertake PGT studies. Not all students had parents who were willing to pay for another year at university, however some were still supported by their parents. The level of fees were seen by some to be an important factor. As the university was able to offer 20% loyalty discounts to former UG students, this was a good reason for choosing it. For some overseas students in particular, the lower living costs in Birmingham when compared to London made it an attractive proposition affecting their choice. The location of the campus close to the city centre was also mentioned as a key factor. It was felt to be a safe campus according to both home based and overseas students.

Some students felt motivated to do PGT study because they wanted build on and further develop their knowledge and skills and specialise in particular areas of business, whilst others explained that that wanted to build on their previous work experience by undertaking a master's programme. Some felt that they needed to focus on specific areas that would help them to gain future employment as managers or to help them start up their own businesses.

Many of the students did not know what to expect when they started their PGT programme. This led to feelings of anxiety and uncertainty for some students. However, these feelings can be mitigated by the university by early building communications with prospective students and by developing a trusting relationship with them. Those students who undertook to complete a pre-master's or pre-sessional programme at the university felt that they were better prepared to start their PGT programmes.

The students said that they faced some challenges when undertaking PGT study. Overseas students explained that they had to get used to very different systems compared to those used in their home country, use of different pedagogy and learning in English, which is a second language for them. Home based students reported that they too found the transition challenging.

In terms of the learning experience, although generally happy and satisfied with it, the students found the pace of the programme to be very fast and intense, which was not always easy. However, they were coping with it. Overall, they reported feeling satisfied with their lecturer's performance in class, which included knowledge of their subject and students. They were found to be supportive and were encouraging nature and their professionalism stood out. It seemed that many non-European, international students are not used to self-directed, autonomous learning approaches, where the focus is on student rather the teacher. Whilst some students do enjoy the sense of self directedness,

others have problems adjusting to the demands of this style of learning. Overall, students knew what to expect in terms of their assessments, either from their induction or pre-sessional programmes, they were aware that a mix of various forms of assessment would be used. The students reported some issues with group work which they felt were mostly language related. They felt that there could be more clarity about the way in which feedback could be delivered. Some students felt that they would like to have more personalised feedback about their own exam performance.

In terms of their skills and knowledge development, the students mentioned how the PGT programme would help. They were keen to develop subject specialist skills, depending on the business programme they were taking and the career path they wished to follow. They believed that employers would value a master's qualification more highly than an undergraduate degree. For overseas students, the ability to improve their English language skills and to study in a foreign country were seen as very beneficial. They felt that having a PGT qualification would help to "differentiate" them from those applicants for jobs who did not hold the qualification. The students said that the UK PGT degree was perceived as having prestige in the employment market. Overseas students felt that it bestowed a great deal of value upon the qualification holder above the cost they paid for it.

Students emphasised the importance of building trusting relationships and rapport with their tutors. They felt the relationships between tutors and students were friendly and positive. The respondents explained that thought it was important to become part of a learning community but it was something that they should manage themselves. They felt that it was a friendly and supportive environment but that it would take time and it wasn't always easy for a learning community to be established. Students thought that there were plenty of events for new PGT starters to help them get to know one another. They mostly enjoyed these events but some students felt there were too many and that they took up too much time. However, they felt that more students should try to participate in them. The respondents felt that PGT students did make more of an effort to communicate with each other because they have all been at university before and were all in the same situation together. Some of the overseas students were a bit more reticent however and seemed happier to use their own language with each other. The students commented positively on the personal and professional changes to their identity brought about by the PGT programme. They also said they felt more self-confident and their self-esteem had grown as a result.

At this time students reported experiencing some administrative issues particularly with the electronic timetable accessed via their phones. This was a source of great frustration for the students. There were also issues for some students with setting up and finding the correct seminar groups and problems with the organisation of dissertation supervision. The respondents felt that

some of the administrative issues they experienced could be overcome through the provision of dedicated PGT programme support team. They felt that a dedicated staff team would pay more attention to their specific concerns and interests.

The feedback on student experiences with the library, LDC, Careers, tutor support and IT services were all overwhelmingly positive. These aspects of the service were praised for being efficient and well organised. The respondents did explain that they felt it would be better if PGT students could have their own learning facilities, however. This would comprise providing a suite of rooms for PGT students' sole use. They also felt that dedicated meeting rooms or a PGT common room would help them to work together on projects and to allow them to socialise together better.

Students reported that by networking with alumni they could learn more about how they could make themselves stand out to other employers. Most students were not aware about the careers services open to them post PGT graduation. This is a pity because it is a valuable service and one that helps to maintain the relationship with graduating students. It is hoped that the students will remain loyal and committed to the university by becoming alumni themselves. Many did feel that they would be keen to do this. They felt committed to the university and its values and wanted to give something back to help other students in the future.

Chapter 6. Discussion

6.0 Introduction

This chapter addresses the research questions presented in both the previous chapter and in chapter three. The research questions were incorporated into the conceptual framework, which linked the key stages of transition to elements of RM and was presented as Figure 3.2 (page 72) in chapter three. This chapter will compare the empirical findings from the research, reported in chapter five, to discuss how they relate to each of the six research questions, in conjunction with the academic literature on transition and RM.

6.1 Research question one

RQ1. Which RM factors impact upon students' motivations and influences their choices when transitioning to PGT study?

This section will compare the findings from the previous chapter with this first research question in order to evaluate the extent to which the question has been answered. The academic literature and conceptual framework outlined the main elements relating to this first stage of approaching or "moving in phase" of transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995) by considering student motivations to undertake PGT studies and influences on their choices, to include: the reputation of the HEI, students' previous experience of university, importance of early communication and induction, family and other influencers, the costs of the programme, the location of the HEI and how students finance their PGT studies. In this section, the key RM factors that relate to this phase of transition are identified and used as subheadings.

6.1.1 Reputation, trust and perceived value – approaching transition

Reputation may be described as the overall perception of an institution, what it stands for, is associated with, and what can be gained from it (MacMillan et al., 2005). Based on the empirical findings from the respondents in the three studies in this research, reputation is found to be a very important RM factor impacting respondents' choice of university and their motivations for pursuing PGT study in the approaching transition phase.

Wilkins and Epps (2011) outlined that when engaging in high involvement purchasing behaviour, a consumer will typically look for as much information as possible to inform their choices and purchase decision making. This is the case for potential students when choosing a university programme. Consumers rely on information provided by suppliers, opinion leaders with experience of the product

or service, and various other sources, such as official government agencies, whereas students can use published league table data from government agencies about teaching and research quality in HEIs to inform their choice of programme and university (Wilkins and Epps, 2011). *(Please refer to section 3.2.2, p. 55).*

The findings from this research reported that the students do in fact rely on rankings, accreditations and league table information to support their decision making. The reputation of the university and how it was ranked and accredited impacted strongly upon students' choice of university. According to Hennig -Thurau et al. (2002) students' perceptions of value and quality, as indicated by the university's reputation, acts as a strong indicator for placing trust or offering them "confidence benefits" in the institution. These so-called confidence benefits link to students' feelings of knowing what to expect, which reduces their potential anxieties about the provider and supports their feelings of trust in that service provider. Trust was found to be a strong influencer of student choice of HEI and PGT programme in this study, as shown in Figure 3.2 conceptual framework (p.72). Berry (1995) determined that trust helps limit feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability in service settings in particular (*Please refer to section 3.4.1, p.62).*

The empirical findings of this research reported that respondents feel their trust in the university is developed mainly via positive WOM and through hearing about its reputation, including for those students whilst overseas, which is vitally important for attracting international students. This is also shown in the conceptual framework. In his research into relationship quality in HE, Al-Alak (2006) found that satisfied customers tended to engage in extensive WOM activities and in so doing, act as promotional agents on behalf of the service provider.

PH, University Marketing Manager said,

> "*many students who apply here see coming to this university as "trading up". Maybe they haven't achieved the first-degree classification they needed or come to us from unis that don't have such a strong reputation as here. Reputation is a huge factor, particularly for the Business School. Rankings and employer links are most important. They hear about this in the international press*".

Whilst the findings from this research did not confirm that the HEI's reputation for research excellence was important, in terms of influencing student choice of institution for PGT study, its teaching excellence (TEF ranking) and reputation for graduate employability were considered to be substantial influencing factors. Whilst the TEF rankings relate to UG teaching quality, many PGT students use this ranking as an overall indicator of a university's teaching quality. In Morgan's (2013) study, teaching quality was found to be an important factor cited by respondents when choosing a university at which to study a PGT programme. The importance of teaching quality for transitioning

PGT students in this research therefore concurs with the findings of Morgan (2013). (*Please refer to section 2.4.2.1, p.25*).

Alves and Raposo (2007) considered the HEI behaviours that helped to predict student satisfaction and found that the quality of teaching experience was a key factor. Interestingly, they also found that institutional reputation tended to be a more important predictor of student satisfaction than was teaching quality. So, it appears that students are satisfied if they receive good teaching at what they consider to be a reputable institute.

Donaldson and McNicholas (2004) found that the overall reputation of the institution was an important factor for PGT students and that accreditation was the most important aspect affecting their choice of institution. In this research, the importance of accreditation was mentioned often by the respondents as an importance influencing factor.

According to Black et al. (2000) the impact of rankings on organisational reputation specifically can be quite substantial, and the study by Schultz et al. (2001) also found evidence to suggest that rankings can have a lasting impact on reputation. The factors most often mentioned in the literature as influencing students' post graduate programme choices included quality and reputation of country/ institution, rankings or accreditations (Wilkins and Epps, 2011). These proved to be important factors affecting students' decisions in this research too, for example Respondent SO (Home student), rankings informed his choice of university in particular:

"I started looking at those FT rankings, obviously they are in the top 100 in the world and in the Eduniversal rankings as well, they're ranking like four palms as one of the top universities".

The findings of this study demonstrate that the concept of reputation is a vitally important RM factor in influencing and motivating students' choices in the pre-transition phase. It is important that a reputation for teaching excellence is supported and maintained, together with appropriate accreditations and high-level international rankings gained wherever possible. This is because reputation bestows other key RM factors to include trust or confidence benefits and a perception of value which will help to attract potential students from both home and overseas. The findings from this study demonstrate the importance of not only reputation management but other supporting RM factors such as confidence benefits, trust and perceptions of value, which impact student transition and have not been acknowledged in this way in the literature before.

6.1.2 Perceived value, branding and commitment – approaching transition

The findings of this research outlined that the brand of a university can be seen to be a signal of perceived quality and value for students. According to Balaji et al. (2016), since value offered by

universities is coming under increasing scrutiny, branding can "*cut through the clutter*" by clearly communicating the value proposition of the university to its students. Branding can support a favourable image and offer a communication signal of quality and trust (Casidy, 2013). Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2016) explain that even though university reputation has tended to be the key indicator of the position of an HEI, a growth in importance of branding and its allied concepts of brand identity, image and reputation have also become increasingly significant. *(Please refer to section 3.4.7, p.65).*

The findings from this empirical research were no exception, as Respondent MG from study 1 explained, his choice of university for PGT study was strongly informed by the HEI's brand,

> "I *wanted the name behind me".*

The students in this study felt that the university had a robust brand and they wanted to be associated with it. The Business School in particular was felt to have a strong, clearly defined brand image and identity in the market.

Dennis et al. (2016) highlighted in their paper that students form early perceptions of brand image, and identity of an HEI well before enrolment (mostly through WOM) and this perception continues to evolve during their studies and when they become alumni. In a study conducted by Nguyen et al. (2016) it was found that brand performance and brand image were in fact more important factors than HEI reputation. (*Please refer to 3.2.3, p.57).*

The reason for the finding was explained by continuing PGT students in this thesis, who were already familiar with the HEI's reputation and had turned their focus on to other elements which include brand performance, which includes the quality of teaching, services and administration together with brand image.

The empirical findings from this research showed that for those returning students, who had studied at the university before, their familiarity with the university and past satisfaction with it, had influenced their choice to continue their studies to PGT level at the HEI. It was found that for local students, familiarity and satisfaction were particularly important influencing factors for them to remain with the university. These findings show that the students' sense of commitment to the HEI, a key RM factor, seems to indicate their desire to remain in the relationship because of their sense of identification, belongingness, liking, involvement, and trust in it, as was outlined by Morgan and Hunt (1994). (*Please to section 3.4.8, p.65).*

According to Prosser and Trigwell (1999), this shows that it is important to consider the prior-learning experiences of students and how the transition from one context to another will be affected by their

prior experiences. If the experience was positive and they were satisfied, they are more likely to be loyal and committed to remaining with the HEI (Pritchard et al., 1999). (*Please refer to section 2.4.2.2, p.26).*

Overall, from the findings of this research, it can be seen that students consider branding to be a signal of the overall quality proposition. The brand can help to communicate a position in the market and help to engender feelings of trust amongst students. Brands need to be supported with a favourable image and excellence in brand performance and quality signals. This will build students' confidence in the brand and, for returning students, support for the brand in terms of their ongoing loyalty and commitment to it which are key RM elements.

6.1.3 Pricing, special treatment benefits and loyalty - approaching transition

According to the findings from this research, another key factor affecting students' motivations and influencing their choices of where to undertake PGT study, was the cost or price associated with a programme. These costs can either be in the form of fees charged by the university for PGT programmes, or the cost of living associated with living in a particular area in the UK.

The findings from this empirical research agree with those of Wu (2014) who found that cost factors were important in determining choice of HEI by overseas students from China. It seems that UK HEIs with lower tuition fees and a lower cost of living compared to London, receive interest particularly amongst students who were less attracted by university rankings. (*Please refer to section 2.4.2.5, p28)*

Some student respondents in this research, felt that the location of the university campus was a key factor affecting their choice of where to study. The location of an institution is a crucial factor in students' decision making, according to Worthington and Higgs (2004). The findings from this this research agree with those of Donaldson and McNicholas (2012) who suggested that local and mature PGT students in particular tended to choose locally based programmes that they felt were more affordable. Stuart (2002) explained that for those students from poorer backgrounds who often have limited money to travel, so an awareness of the local HEI provision is highly important. (*Please refer to section 2.10.1.1, p.44*)

The introduction of PG student loans in the UK since 2016 and the relative ease of the application process seem likely to encourage more UK based students to take up PGT studies. In their study, Mateos-Gonzalez and Wakeling (2020) outlined that the UK postgraduate loan policy will support students from backgrounds who are less able to access other financial means, encouraging them to

take up PGT study. This appears to be the case for some students participating in this empirical study. (*Please refer to 2.4.2.5, p.28*)

The findings of this thesis outline that offers of student scholarships are also important factors that persuade students to undertake a PGT programme. As Respondent UZ (Home student) from Study 1 explained, he took up a place on a PGT programme because he was awarded a scholarship,

> "*I was offered a scholarship which I haven't received just yet..*".

This study found that the 20% loyalty discount on PGT fees offered to UG students who decide to remain at the HEI for their PGT study, can be an important RM special treatment benefit (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002) for those returning students who qualify. The returning students participating this study reported that this had been a key deciding factor for them when choosing an institution for PGT study. According to Gremler and Gwinner (2015), the use of special treatment benefits occurs when loyal customers (in this case, returning students), who have developed a relationship with the service provider, get better deals such as special discounts than others, as a result of the long-term nature of their relationship. (*Please refer to section 3.4.3, p.63*)

Interestingly, this finding disagrees with the study conducted by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2002), who were unable to find a significant direct influence on customer loyalty through the use of special treatment benefits. They argued that such extrinsic rewards would only lead to a temporary behavioural loyalty in customers (or students) and provide only short-term results. The results from this study do not uphold their findings. The same respondents receiving the loyalty discount expressed a wish to become long-term supporters of the university as alumni.

It seems from the findings of the research that issues such as location and the provision of student loans are important factors which may impact student choices in the pretransition phase, however there is no direct control for HEIs in terms of these factors. Lower living costs in certain UK locations can be an important factor for some students. However, the pricing of fees, the provision of scholarships and use of RM factors such as loyalty discounts or special treatment benefits for student returners can be utilised because they also impact upon student decision making about where to undertake their PGT study. Discounts on fees for students can work well in encouraging satisfied, loyal and committed UG students to return to a university. Affordable fees together with scholarships and discounts are clearly more likely to encourage students to take up a place on a PGT programme. These key messages and benefits which need to be communicated widely to potential PGT students.

6.1.4 Segmentation, targeting and positioning – approaching transition

The findings of this research outline the importance of offering a wide variety of both specialist and broad based PGT programmes in order to target and attract various diverse groups of students with differing needs. This supports competitive market differentiation and positioning by the university in terms of providing a variety of PGT programme offerings (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2015). As Donaldson and McNicholas (2004) explained, there has been a growing need for a number of, and variety of, academic products offered due to greater heterogeneity in teaching and research, which is demand led by students. (*Please refer to sections 3.2.4 & 3.2.5, pp.57-58)*

HEIs increasingly need to cater to the needs of very diverse groups of students who can be identified as specific segments from non-traditional backgrounds, international backgrounds, mature people and those who are looking to achieve very specific objectives (Mavondo et al. 2004; Veloutsou et al., 2004; Lundberg, 2003). As Coneyworth et al. (2019) explain, there is a clearly growing requirement for HEIs to consider the differing needs of their diverse cohorts of PGT students and to understand how their expectations, motivations and adaptations can affect their learning experiences and ultimately their successful transition through PGT studies.

The findings of this research outlined that some students are motivated by a desire for professional advancement, their wish to career change, or to build on their previous knowledge and interest in and a desire to become more competent in a particular area of specialism. They want more broad-based business programmes, having already undertaken and successfully completed a more subject specific UG degree. These students felt that reason for taking the programme they had chosen was because it was not offered elsewhere by other HEIs. These findings were similar to those of Flynn (2006) who also found that some groups of students had diverse reasons for choosing to undertake master's programmes. (*Please refer to section 2.4.1, p.24).*

This research study also found that it is important to offer specialist 'conversion' business programmes for those PGT students who wish to change from the subject studied at UG level. These PGT conversion programmes typically appeal to students who wish to pursue an academic or professional career in a particular subject but do not have a first degree in it. (Sheriston et al., 2019). Students often recognise the usefulness of undertaking business programmes for their future career choices and developments. So-called conversion programmes allow students without a bachelor's degree in business to 'convert' to a chosen subject area at PGT level (Budgen et al., 1987). Such programmes are a useful addition to a university's portfolio of programmes and support its market positioning. These findings agree with the study undertaken by Mellors-Bourne et al. (2014) that identified that many students wanted to undertake more specialist learning via their PGT studies.

It was also clear from the findings of this research, that some respondents were motivated to pursue PGT studies due to their own personal interests. The student respondents report becoming interested in undertaking PGT business programmes to study for their own personal interests and to develop skills and insights in business rather than subjects they may have studied at UG level. This finding concurs with the study by Mellors-Bourne et al. (2014) who also found that personal interest and subject choices at PGT level were often key motivators, although this was mostly linked to professional and career interests. Personal interest in the discipline was also found to be a strong motivator according to a recent PTES report (Neves and Lehman, 2019).

Similarly, the empirical findings of this research found that self-development can also be an important motivational factor for those undertaking PGT programmes. It seems that the students felt that gaining a PGT qualification would be helpful in gaining employment opportunities, in meeting new people and developing new skills and knowledge. The findings from this research highlight that this form of self-development can be a key motivational factor. In studies by Lui (2010) and by Harvey at al. (2005), they found that self-development is often a key reason for students to undertake PGT studies. Based on these findings, the importance of undertaking PGT study self-development purposes needs to be highlighted via the HEI's communication media.

The findings of this thesis also suggests that it is important for some students to build upon their existing knowledge and this was a factor influencing their motivations to start PGT study straight after their UG studies. The respondents in this research felt that students graduating from UG studies were ready to embark upon their PGT studies immediately after graduating. For example, Respondent JU (EU student) said,

"*I guess I was more prepared than most people because I just didn't get out of that study mode".*

Surprisingly however, the findings outlined from this study seem to disagree with those from Cluett and Skene's (2006) Australian based study, which suggested that PGT students felt that their previous experience had not equipped them particularly well for the PGT level of study. (*Please refer to section 2.4.2.2, p.26).*

This research indicated that some students want to build on their past work experience by undertaking a master's programme, as they felt that they could develop their career options further this way. This study supports the findings from Artess et al. (2014) who reported that employers' requirements for students with master's level qualifications are linked to requirements for specific skills, abilities and knowledge. Understanding the choices and decision making of prospective students need to link to the HEI's segmentation, targeting and positioning strategy through a clear identification of prospective students' purchase behaviour and needs (Maringe, 2006).

Whilst segmentation, targeting and positioning strategies are not specifically RM strategies, they are important marketing approaches that are commonly applied in service settings. Service industries have utilised many different segmentation bases to articulate their service strategies with great success (Ghosh et al., 2008). Understanding the needs and wants of target segments is a fundamental principle of successful marketing practice. (*Please refer to section 3.2.4, p.58*)

As this research shows, the provision of a suitable range of programme offerings should be developed to appeal to diverse, heterogenous groups of students with differing requirements of PGT study. This is an appropriate marketing strategy which allows for broader competitive positioning in the PGT market (Helmsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2015). (*Please refer to 3.2.5, p.58*).

6.1.5 Communication and WOM recommendations - approaching transition

The findings from this study outline that it is important that HEIs understand, when marketing their PGT programmes, that audiences are not only the potential students, but also include the prospective students' family and other influencers. This supports the findings of Wilkins and Epps (2011) who stated that the recommendations of family, friends, tutors, and agents are critical to students' decision making. The findings from this study highlighted that lecturers and tutors can be key in guiding graduates towards suitable PGT programmes. Therefore, tutors' ongoing relationships with graduating bachelors students are important to sustain.

In a study by Al-Alak (2006), he considered that an HEI's RM efforts to acquire students and to retain them should be focused on not only the students but on others such as parents, relatives, friends and reference groups who may influence the student too. Al-Alak (2006) posited that the survival of the HEI is dependent upon its capacity for attracting, acquiring and retaining students throughout the length of their programmes until they graduate. Casidy (2014) suggested that the word of mouth (WOM) recommendations of family, peers, alumni, and tutors at other institutions should not be overlooked by any HEI seeking to promote its programmes. (*Please refer to section 2.4.2.3, p.27*).

The findings from this research were no exception to this, with the recommendations from family members, friends, alumni, peers and others such as tutors and agents playing a key influencing role on student choice of PGT programme and HEI. For example, MI, (Overseas student), explained her choice was informed by a friend who had prior knowledge of the university,

> " *I knew (the university) is good because one of my classmates, she studied here before and she told me about the university".*

This research study found that WOM recommendations offer far more credible sources of marketing information for prospective students who do not trust "paid for" advertisements and other

promotions by HEIs. WOM (including e-WOM through social media) communication is a key RM factor in terms of influencing student opinion and in supporting the reputation and trust in the HEI. (*Please refer to section 3.4.10, p.66*).

According to Dehne (2000), students look to recommendations garnered from their most trusted sources of information when choosing a programme or university. This includes endorsements from current or past students as word of mouth (WOM) recommendations which increase the credibility of the message and tangibility for the HEI (Dehne, 2000). Worthington and Higgs (2004) found that, WOM communication and the HEI's web site are key influencers, as students place much less importance upon a prospectus. Vander Schee (2010) felt that tutors and admissions staff can play an important role in influencing students' decisions, by building rapport and trust with students at an early stage, offering them personal attention and treating them as individuals. In addition, talks provided by past PGT students (alumni) about what to expect as a postgraduate appear to be of value to prospective students (Vander Schee, 2010). The student respondents in this study confirmed that these endorsements and influencers played a key role in helping make the decision about which HEI and PGT programme to choose.

This research found that for overseas students, agents from their home countries can also play an important influencing role. Respondent XB (Overseas student) from study 3, thought that agent recommendations were important alongside the advice of a tutor from back home*,*

> *"Almost all Chinese students they go to university through an agent. I think this is part of the reason I came to X and the other part is the recommendation from my agency. Also because of my teacher … she suggested about four schools, one of them was X."*

This highlights the importance for the HEI in building strong ongoing relationships with its overseas based agents, in terms of supporting agents' recommendations to prospective students applying to university for PGT study and supports the findings from Wilkins and Epps' (2011) study.

The findings from this empirical research also outline the importance of establishing early contact with UG students who are considering applying for PGT study. Respondent MI (Overseas student) said,

> *"I think X did this very well because they email …they pay more attention to the details they send to us early on than other universities"*.

Transitioning students to PGT programmes expect to have regular updates from the HEI to make them feel welcome and help in prepare them for their programmes, according to the University of Leeds, PGT Transition Programme Report (2015). *(Please refer to section 2.4.2.4, p.28).*

As Donaldson and McNicholas (2004) explained, potential students at postgraduate level expect prompt replies to enquiries, adequate, timely information, staff who are professional, friendly and helpful, good organisation, administration and a manageable, easy application process. The findings from the students in this research felt that this was very important. Good, efficient and effective processes create a favourable impression upon the prospective students. This is more likely to convert prospects into applicants (Hesketh and Knight, 1999). As Sultan and Wong (2011) explain, the need to provide sufficient and reliable information to prospective students, before enrolment, can have beneficial effects in forming aspects of service quality for an HEI. Due to the specific nature of HE services, it is crucial to focus on students' pre–enrolment information requirements through the provision of sufficient and detailed information, ensuring authenticity, keeping promises and above all focusing on what students need in terms of information (Sultan and Wong, 2011).

This research also reported that detailed information on programme content through module specifications and learning and teaching strategies should be made available via the website and/or videos. Crucially, a university website is simply seen as a 'hygiene factor' by students, at the very least it is expected to be up to date. The information provided to students should include Open Day details and links to Programme Directors, who should contact applicants so that relationships can established as early on as possible. (*Please refer to section 3.4.10, p.66)*

This point was echoed by PH, University Marketing Manager:

> "*It's really important to try to keep in close contact with prospective students who enquire as soon as possible through our Enquiry Management system which is part of the university's CRM system".*

Customer relationship management (CRM) systems provide HEIs with a central hub of integrated data that that deploy powerful analytical capabilities geared towards enhancing the organisation's relationship with its customers (Solomon et al., 2019). These CRM systems can be used to send out automated, customised emails and other messages to applicants very quickly and effectively. (*Please refer to section 3.4.11, p.67).*

The careful management of communications and support for WOM are shown in this research to be critical RM activities for the pretransition phase. Students are influenced in their choice of university and PGT programme through the recommendations of many individuals, such as family, friends, tutors and overseas agents, who all need to receive consistent marketing messages. Students rely more heavily on WOM recommendations and e-WOM through social media, which are seen as more credible than other more traditional media messages, therefore encouraging alumni to provide supportive and positive messages is critical. Additionally, early ongoing contact to establish a rapport

with potential applicants is vital. Efficient administration and easy application processes are very necessary, with a CRM system to support tailored communications with students.

6.1.6 Summary – approaching transition

It can be seen that based on the discussion of the findings and literature in the section outlined above, it can be seen that various RM factors can impact on students' motivations and influence their choices in the approaching or pre-transition phase to PGT study. In answering RQ1, the key RM factors identified as having a key impact on this pre-transition phase include the following:

1) Influencing students' notions of quality and trust in the HEI through its reputation, supported by rankings accreditation and WOM endorsements from satisfied alumni.

2) Developing an attractive brand, image and perceptions of value in comparison to other HEIs.

3) Using confidence benefits and building a rapport with students to build their trust.

4) Encouraging the development of positive WOM (and e-WOM) endorsements through key influencers such as family, friends, peers, alumni, tutors and overseas agents.

5) Supporting students' commitment and loyalty to the HEI through the use of special treatment benefits such as fee discounts and scholarships.

6) Competitively positioning the HEI to attract prospective and diverse student segments with a variety of PGT offerings that attract, interest and develop students' employability for the future.

7) Establishing early communications with students using efficient administrative processes and CRM systems in order to develop a relationship with students early on at the applicant stage.

There is clearly some element of overlap between the RM factors in the elements of this approaching transition phase, however this clearly illustrates the importance of the RM and other marketing factors such as segmentation targeting and positioning in influencing the motivations and choices of students. This is the only academic study to date which has highlighted the importance of the RM factors outlined above in the approaching transition phase for students.

6.2 Research question 2

 RQ2. Which RM factors influence students' expectations, experiences and perceptions of the value of PGT programmes?

In this section and to answer the second research question, which relates to the Situational phase of transition, the key RM elements which impact on this phase will be discussed based on the literature

and the research findings. In the conceptual framework, this phase was identified as the first S in the "moving through" phase of transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995) The literature in chapter two outlined the main transitional elements linked to the Situation phase which included: students' expectations of transition, feelings, early experiences, issues with self-directed, autonomous learning assessment, feedback and issues with group work. In this section, the key RM factors that relate to this phase are identified and used as subheadings.

6.2.1 Building confidence benefits and rapport - Situation phase

The findings from this empirical study reported that when respondents were asked about their overall feelings towards starting a PGT programme, most had rather mixed feelings. There was excitement but there was evidently some nervousness too. For many, there were positive feelings towards their transition to PGT study. However, not all students felt as positive. Some students expressed having negative feelings. These findings concur with those of Heussi (2012) who highlighted the difficulties that some students may have in engaging and adjusting to their PGT studies. (*Please refer to section 2.5.2, p.31).*

As Lowe and Cook (2003) explained, most students manage the transition into university life as undergraduates successfully and do not experience the academic, personal and practical difficulties they thought they might find. However, as Lowe and Cook (2003) explained, a sizable minority do experience some academic and personal problems and find their university experience was negative. Such students may suffer from under-performance, as the mismatches between their expectations and the actual reality are dysfunctional in nature (McInnis et al., 1995). Whilst the work of Lowe and Cook (2003) related specifically to the expectations and experiences of UG students, it is felt that students transitioning to PGT programmes could potentially experience similar feelings and expectations. *(Please refer to section 2.5.1, p.30*).

However, it seems that students' concerns and nervousness about transitioning to PGT study could however be dispelled by ensuring that they are fully made aware about what to expect. Gremler and Gwinner (2015) explained that so called "confidence benefits" are the benefits that customers (or students) enjoy as a result of the reduced anxiety and risk experienced when they engage in a service due to the relationship and trust they have in the organisation. An example of this can be explained as having a sense of knowing what to expect. Symons (2001) also reported that many PGT students found difficulties at the start of the programme and felt they needed more direction to begin with. (*Please refer to section 3.4.1, p.62).*

This study found that it is important that students are made fully aware of what to expect early on in the transitional period. A good example of what could be provided was given by Respondent AS

(Overseas student) from study 2 said more information was required and talks should be given by alumni*," I think the university could help by sending me more information or even videos about what it's like to do a masters. Perhaps with students who have studied on PG programmes before talking about what to expect, what has been the biggest problems they had to overcome".*

In this research it was found that the overseas (Chinese) respondents were worried about the possibility of failing their PGT programmes and thereby letting down their families that were supporting them financially. This matches the findings of Owen and Loomes (2010) whose study outlined that difficulties with transition may be exacerbated for international PGT students. The mix of intense demands made upon them can lead to them feeling a lack of connectedness, unhappiness, dissatisfaction, isolation and alienation, guilt, anger and tension (Mather, 2007; Seah, 2008). These feelings need to be acknowledged and appropriate services put in place by the HEI for those students experiencing anxieties or other difficulties in order to prevent them from withdrawing from the programme and feeling dissatisfied with the service provided. (*Please refer to section 2.5.2, p.31).*

RM practices which build a dialogue and develop feelings of trust or confidence benefits would therefore seem to be beneficial in establishing a connection and rapport with all transitioning PGT students. It is really important that students know what to expect at the start of their PGT studies. As Palmer and Koening Lewis (2011) suggest, the early stages of building a student's relationship with the university is vitally important as it is most likely to affect their subsequent relationship with it.

6.2.2 Communicating expectations and differentiated service offerings – Situation phase

The findings from this research highlighted how students felt it was important to be properly prepared when transitioning into PGT study. In a study by Liu (2010) with regard to student preparedness, PGT students were expected to be ready to develop a deeper understanding of the subject and foster a wider range of cognitive, practical and personal skills than in their undergraduate education. *(Please refer to section 2.5.3, p.32).*

Bamber et al. (2017) identified that any lack of clarity around expectations may lead some PGT students to feel ill-prepared for, and concerned, about entering PGT study. As Owen and Loomes (2010) argued, HEIs need to provide a range of social, learning support and integration activities for transitioning PGT students. The use of RM approaches, through early communication would help to build relationships with the students and allay any anxieties they may be suffering (Palmer and Koenig-Lewis, 2011).

In this research, it was found that respondents who had undertaken a pre-master's or pre-sessional programme, felt better prepared to start their PGT programmes because this is exactly what these

programmes were designed to do. However, some other students explained that they mostly felt that were prepared and ready to undertake the transition into PGT study anyway, following straight on from their UG studies. However, according to Heussi (2012) even though students who decide to enter PGT programmes have been successful in obtaining their undergraduate degrees and have experience within the HE system, it can be assumed that they are familiar with expectations of study. However, this is often not the case, as seen with this research. (*Please refer to 2.4.2.2, p.26).*

The current research study found that it cannot be assumed that all students feel totally prepared to take on PGT studies directly from their UG programmes. This is an issue that needs to be considered, as unprepared students may struggle to deal with the challenges of PGT study. The need for detailed communications, carefully constructed induction and integration programmes and underpinning academic support is required.

As Brown (2007) suggested, expectations needed to be clearly communicated to PGT students early on in the academic year, particularly in terms of how learning approaches are used in a UK HEI. Liu (2010) explained that, international students, who can make up a sizeable segment of the student body, have to contend with the transition they make from the education environment of their home country to that of the UK. This study found that this difference can naturally, can be rather daunting prospect, as the overseas students explain that they have to get used to very different systems compared to those in their home countries' universities, use of different pedagogy and learning in English, a second language for them. (*Please refer to section 2.5.4, p.32).*

In this research it was found that not only overseas but home-based students also found the transition to be a challenge too. However, this finding does not appear to be exceptional, as both Liu (2010) and Coneyworth et al. (2019) suggested that a significant number of both home and international PGT students reported difficulties in understanding what was expected of them as PGT students. According to Kingston and Forland (2008) many non-European, international students are not used to student-centred, self-directed PGT learning approaches used by UK HEI, where students are expected to become more autonomous, independent learners rather than the lecturer being central to their learning. *(Please refer to 2.5.5, p.33).*

The findings from this research outlined that the increased the expectation for self-direction and autonomous learning, where the focus is on student rather the teacher, can be quite a new experience for PGT students. The overseas students from China felt that there was an expectation in the UK for autonomous learning at PGT level, which was not the case in China, where a more didactic form of pedagogy was prevalent. They also felt that number of contact hours with tutors was rather low. The teaching and learning approaches should not come as a shock to transitioning PGT students.

The approaches used at this level need to be communicated to students by HEIs well in advance through early communications by building a rapport with these students.

O'Donnell et al. (2013) highlighted that PGT student cohorts can be very heterogeneous, as this research study confirms. Whilst some students do enjoy the sense of self directedness, these tended to be the UK based students. Others have problems in making the adjustment to the demands of the style of learning. Coates and Dickinson (2012) argued that HEIs need to try harder to understand their students' learning backgrounds in order that they can develop learning and teaching strategies to facilitate both home and international students to realise their potential. This need for greater awareness of students' learning needs should be supported through closer relationships and communication by the HEI. This is particularly important for PGT students who, as Coates and Dickinson (2012) explain, unlike undergraduates on three to four-year programmes, do not have much time for acculturation. (*Please refer to section 2.5.6, p.33*).

Heussi (2013) suggested that international PGT students in particular need more detailed programme inductions and signposting to early support and intervention provided. This should help to prevent student failure and withdrawal.

As ED, Post-graduate Student Development Lead said:

> "*All students on Business programmes undergo an intensive and rigorous induction at this university to ensure they understand what is required. They have workshops and activities in their groups specifically for this*".

Any failure on the part of HEIs to live up to the service expectations of students can create problems related to student retention (Dailey, et al. 2006). Hence, differentiated service strategies must be designed to meet the needs of diverse groups of students (Ghosh et al., 2007). In service markets, organisations such as HEIs can benefit by segmenting the market in order to understand the specific needs of each group, and then designing offerings to satisfy the needs of some or all of these segments (Dailey, et al. 2006; Diaz-Martin et al., 2000). (*Please refer to section 3.2.3, p.57).*

This research has shown that a differentiated approach adopted by HEIs, in not treating PGT students as one homogeneous group, would support all students. This is regardless whether or not students are domiciled in the UK or overseas, as it would help them to cope better with the demands of PGT programmes. Differences in pedagogical approaches, expectations of study, induction and integration programmes to prepare them for the programme need to be communicated in a clear, timely and meaningful way. Students that struggle to meet the demands of the programme, despite being suitably qualified to join it, may decide to withdraw.

6.2.3 Service quality, co-creation and adding value – Situation phase

The findings from this research, regarding the quality of PGT learning activities, confirmed that the students felt satisfied with the content of their lectures, which they said, included plenty of practical aspects and good lecturer performance in class. As Sultan and Wong (2011) found, past learning experiences of students have a significant impact on their perceptions of HEI service quality. (*Please refer to section 3.4.6, p.64).*

Student experiences and satisfaction appear to be one of the key issues that play a vital role in forming students' quality perceptions. This is because during service encounters customers evaluate their past experience of receiving the same service with the present one (Sultan and Wong, 2011). Students that have previously experienced satisfaction with the HEI in their UG studies are more likely to perceive that they will have a good experience with the same HEI for PGT study and are consequently more inclined to feel committed and loyal to it. (*Please refer to section 3.4.5, p.63).*

In their explorative study into service quality in higher education, Voss, Gremler and Szmigin (2007) considered the desired teaching qualities of lecturers and found that students wanted their lecturers to be knowledgeable, enthusiastic, approachable, and friendly. In this study, the students reported that this was certainly no exception. They also reported finding their tutors to be friendly, supportive, knowledgeable and approachable. As Respondent RU (Local student) said,

> *"You know, the tutors, they seem like they really know their stuff and they come to the lectures, you know, early and it's really good —I've not had a bad experience here to be fair."*

Considering the application of RM approaches, it seems that social relationship factors such as tolerance, liking and respect between the parties involved can certainly help to influence the development of service loyalty and in building a rapport as claimed in the literature. (Goodwin and Gremler, 1996; Gremler and Gwinner, 2000).

This research found that in developing service quality at the PGT level, not only is there a need to build a rapport between students and tutors, but an expectation to engage students in co-creation of learning with their tutors. Ng and Forbes (2009) highlighted the importance of students as co-creators of the learning experience. In co-creating their learning experience, students have two key roles to play in creating the outcome: both as a creative resource and as a contributor to quality, satisfaction, and value of the learning experience (Bitner et al., 2013). However, as Astin (1984) explained, without students' participation and involvement in the co-creation process then successful outcomes for the students are not possible. It is therefore vital that HEIs support this approach to student learning. (*Please refer to 3.2.1, p.55).*

In this research study the students felt they would gain added value from the various skills that they would either gain or improve by completing the PGT programme. The need to develop and enhance skills relevant to a PGT student's career progression and future employment is essential, according to the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (2010). Their specific knowledge development, as one might expect, was contingent on the subject area they were studying. The importance of gaining cultural insights were also mentioned by the respondents in this study. Many students listed critical thinking, communication, research, leadership, teamwork, time management and planning skills as the most important skill areas they would improve. *(Please refer to section 2.5.7, p.34).*

Ravald and Grönroos (1996) highlighted that value is considered to be an important outcome of RM and the ability to provide superior value to customers is determined to be a most successful competitive strategy and important means of organisational differentiation.

The findings from this study confirmed that perceived future employment opportunities are one of the key reasons why students decide to undertake PGT study. Students feel that further knowledge and skills development will help them to secure a good job and that employers would value a master's qualification more highly than an undergraduate degree. These findings agree with those from Morgan's (2013) study, in which student respondents also felt that employers would value a PGT qualification over an undergraduate degree. (*Please refer to section 2.5.8, p.35).*

 The respondents believed that a PGT qualification would help to differentiate and set them apart from other graduates with "only" a UG degree. The findings are certainly in agreement with the statement from Wolf (2002) that holding a UG degree has become increasingly ubiquitous and the relative advantage it once provided to graduates entering employment has now decreased in value. As Crouch and Goulding (2013) explain, it seems that increasing numbers of UG students are deciding to remain at university and take a PGT programme, in an effort to differentiate themselves in the highly competitive graduate jobs market and improve their employment prospects. (*Please refer to section 2.5.9, p.35).*

According to this research, HEIs that can demonstrate and communicate their reputation for supporting PGT students into employment via careers and alumni support facilities and through networking and relationships with employers, are more likely to attract and retain students. Donaldson and McNicholas' (2004) study found that students wanted to do PGT study in order to acquire or update the skills necessary to do their current job better or make them more employable in future. In this research, some students felt that the opportunity for an internship whilst on the PGT programme would also enhance and add value to their employment prospects. This is an important aspect that HEIs need to consider building into their PGT programmes.

A PGT degree from the UK was perceived by the overseas respondents in this research as having some prestige in the employment market back in their home country. Overseas students felt that holding a qualification from a UK HEI with a good reputation bestowed a great deal of added value upon the qualification holder, above the cost they paid for it. *(Please refer to section 3.4.2, p.62).*

Therefore, as Teeroovengadum et al. (2019) explain, and as suggested by equity theory, the more that students perceive the trade-off between what they pay and what they receive in return is fair, they will hold more favourable emotional responses toward the HEI and take pride in their university's prestige. In the study conducted into RM in the US HE sector by Arnett et al. (2003), a university's prestige was found to have an important affect upon alumni behaviour in particular. It was found to increase the salience of the student's university identity and affected their behaviour in terms of their readiness to promote the university to others, through WOM communication. (*Please refer to section 2.10.4.2, p.48).*

The findings from this study certainly agree with those of Arnett et al. (2003), as students felt that the prestige of the university supported their newfound identities as postgraduates.

6.2.4 Satisfaction, loyalty and rapport – Situation phase

The findings of this study outlined students' early experiences with their PGT learning activities. They found the pace of learning to be very fast and intense which was not always easy. However, they felt that were coping overall. The respondents felt that PGT study constituted a focused and intense learning experience that would appear to be a big step up in terms of level of difficulty and challenge, possibly with limited support provided. (*Please refer to section 2.5.4, p.32)*. Respondent US (Local student) from study 2 felt a bit unsure about PGT study,

> *"I'm not too sure about it, but generally I think it will be like my learning jump from my second year of university to now my final year."*

It appears that using RM approaches to develop supportive relationships and establish learning communities through the support of their peers, tutors and others through early, ongoing, contact is imperative.

Senior et al. (2017) reported that unsurprisingly, high quality teaching is an important factor in student satisfaction. Teaching excellence is seen to be crucially important for an HEI and the power of student choice is such that, if a university is unable to deliver on its core service well i.e. teaching students, it is unlikely to remain in existence for long. Alves and Raposo (2007) in their study determined the effects of satisfied students. They identified that satisfaction bred loyalty and that students who were satisfied were more loyal to the institution and would be more likely to support

alumni activities and maintain an ongoing positive relationship with their former university. *(Please refer to section 3.4.6, p.64).*

This study found the same links between satisfaction, commitment and loyalty to the HEI, which are shown in Figure 3.2 (p.72).

In this research, respondents were asked about their experiences with assessment, group work and feedback specifically. With regard to assessment, the majority of students felt they mostly knew what to expect, either from induction or pre-sessional programmes, that a mix of various forms of assessment could be used. Not all students reported that they were exactly sure about the assessment requirements on their programmes though. It seems critical that students should be clear about what is expected of them. Any misunderstandings can lead to student failure and withdrawal. Access to student support should be made available and communicated to students in good time. According to Tobbell et al. (2010) some PGT students find time availability and time management issues can present difficulties in terms of completing assessments to deadline due to the external demands placed on some of them. (*Please refer to section 2.10.2.1, p.44).*

The research reported that students found that group work was often difficult. There were issues with language barriers preventing participation within diverse cultural groups. However, other overseas students mostly felt it was a good opportunity to practice their language skills. Support with language should be provided where necessary but overall, it seems that students do benefit from the group work experience and it can be a source of satisfaction for most students. These findings agree with comments by Gabriel and Griffiths (2008) there is an expectation for students to work together in mixed cultural teams, particularly in business and management PGT programmes. The approach is well accepted and prepares students for their future business-related careers. (*Please refer to section 2.10.2.2, p.45).*

The findings from this thesis outlined that there could be more clarity not only about assessment but also the way in which feedback could be delivered. Some students felt that they would like to have more personalised feedback about their own exam performance. Man et al. (2018) recommended the use of peer assessment and feedback could help to engage students in academic conversations with tutors that could support the establishment of a learning community and a greater sense of belonging and rapport. This could also help to reduce anxiety amongst students about assessment and feedback (Dickson et al., 2019). (*Please refer to section 2.10.2.3, p.45).*

Student satisfaction is key performance indicator for most HEIs, and this is as true for PGT programmes as it is for UG. Good communication through excellence in service delivery helps to

support other important RM factors such as student satisfaction and by building a rapport with students engenders their loyalty and commitment to the HEI.

6.2.5 Summary – Situation Phase

Based on the discussion of the literature and findings in the section above, in can be seen that several RM and other marketing factors influence students' expectations, experiences and perceptions of value of PGT programmes. In answering RQ2, the RM and marketing factors identified in this section as having an influence on the Situational aspects of transition include:

1) Reducing in feelings of anxiety and risk through the development of confidence benefits or trust in the HEI, thereby supporting retention of students and preventing early programme withdrawal.

2) Early communications and information provided to students prior to the commencement of their PGT study about the pedagogy used and what to expect in terms of assessment, group work and feedback.

3) Offering an excellent learning experience through the co-creation of learning and service quality to segmented heterogeneous groups of PGT students leading to student retention and satisfaction.

4) Building a rapport with students through supportive relationships and networks and developing a sense of belonging and a learning community.

5) Building perceptions of good value for money for students and sense of prestige from gaining a UK based PGT qualification and through the HEI's reputation.

Once again there is some overlap between the RM factors within the elements of this Situation based transition phase, but the importance of the RM and other service-related marketing factors which include co-creation of value, value for money, prestige and segmentation, can all be shown to be vital in influencing students' expectations, experiences and perceptions of value of PGT study in the first phase of transition. This is the first academic study to date which has identified that RM, and other marketing factors outlined above, can have a positive effect on this phase of student transition.

6.3 Research question three

RQ3. Which RM factors induce relationship building, networking activities and strategies for PGT students during transition?

In this section and to answer the third research question, which relates to the Strategies phase of transition, the key RM elements which impact on this phase will be discussed based on the literature and the research findings. In the conceptual framework, this phase was identified as the second S in the "moving through" phase of transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995) The literature in chapter two outlined the main transitional elements linked to the Strategies phase which included: socialisation processes, learning communities of practice, networking and social events and culture and language. In this section, the key RM factors that relate to this phase are identified and used as subheadings.

6.3.1 Building rapport, confidence benefits, trust and commitment - Strategies phase

The findings from this research indicate that establishing a good rapport and relationship early on between students and tutors are critical in terms of student socialisation and in supporting their expectations of successful programme outcomes. It appears that building a rapport via networking and learning communities of practice (CoP) helps to establish trust between the students and tutors, supporting good working relationships and student satisfaction.

For example, O'Donnell et al. (2009) described the transition to PGT study by using the CoP framework. They described how heterogenous groups of PGT students were able to find points of shared commonality and were able to build a learning community through their interactions with each other. Menzies and Baron (2014) reported that socialisation was an important element in supporting students' transition into a postgraduate environment. They argued that it should ideally start early on in transition so that good working relationships can be set up and students can feel they "belong". This is very important for the establishment of feelings of trust or confidence benefits and commitment. Mukherjee and Nath (2003) outlined that feeling a degree of association with an HEI on the part of students and sense of belonging are key aspects of commitment development. (*Please refer to sections 2.6.1., p.36 & 3.4.8, p.65*).

This research study outlined that respondents felt it was important to become part of a learning community, but it was something that they should manage themselves. They felt that the university had a friendly and supportive environment, but it wasn't always easy for learning community to be established and it took time. This process is one that is suggested to be tantamount to the creation of a feeling of 'belonging' (Matheson and Sutcliffe, 2018) openness and trust. This supportive community, student respondents in this study felt, would help them to feel satisfied with their programme choice. The importance of building a learning CoP and having a supportive network were seen as critical both during the programme and for the future.

Matheson and Sutcliffe (2018) explained that those students who became more actively and socially involved with a learning community, often found the transition process to be more straight forward,

as they developed their self-confidence and felt more able to join in. *(Please refer to section 2.6.2, p.36).*

In this research, the respondents articulated that PGT study was felt to be a very varied experience in terms of the student population from diverse cultural backgrounds. Most felt this would provide what Henning Thurau et al. (2002) described as social benefits, in terms of building a rapport with other students and learning about other cultures, would lead to a satisfactory experience overall. (*Please refer to section 3.4.4, p.63*).

 This point was echoed by PH, University Marketing Manager, in terms of recruiting international PGT students. PH said,

> *"For overseas students in particular the PGT experience seems to be all about being in the UK and having that cultural experience of life in the UK".*

Some students expressed difficulties in understanding each other due to language barriers and problems with English language capabilities. This was felt to be quite frustrating when trying to organise group work in particular. It seems that many overseas students find it hard to participate in group debates and team-based exercises (Holmes, 2005; Parks and Raymond, 2004; Ramsey and Mason, 2004). This situation could lead to dissatisfaction amongst some PGT students which could lead to withdrawal, if left unaddressed.

The findings in this research show that it is important to develop fluency in English on the part of overseas students due to their desire to network and build a rapport with other students from diverse cultural backgrounds. This is important for their personal, social and career development back in their home country (Edwards and Li, 2011). As Wu (2014) suggested, greater opportunities for students to develop their wider cultural capital through contacts should be provided. (*Please refer to section 2.6, p.35).*

Based on their study into transition in Australia, Menzies and Baron (2014) suggested the importance of building positive interaction experiences and events for students, allowing them to network with each other. This enables students to build friendships and support strategies to aid them through the transition process. For international students in particular, past research by Shapiro and Levine (1999) linked student success to involvement in such activities and interactions. The social and emotional support offered by peers can aid the transition process through the use of RM factors such as developing a sense of trust and confidence benefits amongst the student body. *(Please refer to section 3.4.1, p.62).*

The findings from this research highlighted the importance of social events and activities as seminars and employer/careers events were felt to be beneficial in helping students settle in, to provide opportunities for finding jobs internships and getting to know one another. The student respondents said it was important to start networking by building links with other students, staff and others such as potential employers.

As ED, the Post-graduate Student Development Lead said,

> *"what we are preparing students for, it's not just about the academic side, it's also about preparing them for what comes next. We say these people you are working with, they're your network. They could be future colleagues. A lot of them remain in touch with each other years after the PG programme".*

This research has shown that, in this phase of transition, RM factors can assist students in terms of their socialisation within the HEI, feelings of belonging and trust. Networking opportunities and CoPs allow students to develop a rapport with each other which strengthen their social and emotional support strategies. This will lead them to develop good working relationships and satisfaction.

6.3.2 Summary – Strategies phase

From the discussion of the literature and the findings from this research, this section shows that the RM factors induce relationship building, networking activities and strategies during students' transition to PGT study. In answering RQ3, the following RM factors can be seen to have an important influence during the Strategies phase of transition:

1) Building rapport and social benefits between staff and students.

2) Supporting a sense of belonging to engender commitment and satisfaction.

3) Developing trust and confidence benefits through encouraging the use of CoPs and networks through social events to encourage friendships and to offer students social and emotional support strategies.

This section has identified the RM factors listed above can support students by providing socialisation strategies that will help them overcome issues of loneliness, anxiety and isolation they may experience during the early transitional stage to PGT study. This is the first study to highlight and suggest key RM factors that can be used in order to support PGT students in this transitional period.

6.4 Research question four

RQ4. Which RM factors affect personal changes and impact students' identities during their PGT studies?

In this section and to answer the fourth research question, which relates to the Self phase of transition, the key RM elements which impact on this phase will be discussed based on the literature and the research findings. In the conceptual framework, this phase was identified as the third S in the "moving through" phase of transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995) The literature in chapter two outlined the main transitional elements linked to the Self phase included: student identity changes, identity salience, enhancing self-worth and self-esteem, shaping personal and professional identity. In this section the key RM factors that relate to this phase are identified and used as subheadings.

6.4.1 Satisfaction, social benefits and rapport – Self phase

The findings from this research outlined that the respondents felt that identity changes were taking place because they were undertaking a PGT programme. These changes included feeling more optimistic and positive for the future and that their professional identities were being developed. The students reported feeling more adaptable, well rounded, becoming more professional and the ability to "sell" themselves better in the workplace. The UG respondents in study two in particular, strongly expressed ideas that completing a PGT programme would help them to feel a sense of pride and achievement in gaining a more professional identity. These findings concur with those of Wenger (1998) who explained that the acquisition of knowledge and skills are carried out in the service of identity. As he stated,

> " learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity…a process of becoming…a certain person" (p.215).

Tobbell et al. (2010) considered the development of students' academic identities in light of both their wider experience and the university's practices and found that this is a key factor in understanding transition. According to Adams et al. (2006), when students undertake the transition to university studies, the changes they are required to make often leads them to re-evaluate their own identities and ways of doing things. Lairio et al. (2013) explained that identity refers to an individual's perception of themselves as a person and in the way in which they see themselves in relation to others. Fellow students, tutors and social role models are important "shapers" of their identity (Gallacher et al., 2002). (*Please refer to 2.7.1, p.39).*

This research found that it is important that students' early achievements are celebrated and the programme content they are accessing helps them to develop their sense of professionalism and satisfaction. Good and Adams (2008) explained that a supportive learning environment together with academic achievement helps to provide positive identity construction and satisfaction for students. The findings from this empirical research study agree with this viewpoint.

Tobbell and O'Donnell (2010) commented on previous literature regarding postgraduate transition, challenging the idea that postgraduate students experience uncertainty and a lack of confidence when engaging with postgraduate study.

This research study found that students certainly commenced their PGT studies feeling uncertain and somewhat lacking in self-confidence. However, after only a few weeks on the programme, they had already reported a growth in their self-confidence and self-esteem which they felt satisfied would continue as they built stronger relationships and rapport with their peers, tutors and others. They felt this would help to offer them better opportunities for the future. The UG respondents also reported that they thought their self-confidence and self-esteem would grow as a result of making the transition to PGT study. *(Please refer to 2.7.3, p.40).*

This research shows that HEIs can have an important role in terms of shaping their PGT students' academic and professional identities. This is supported by encouraging them to adopt the more salient identities that lead to successful attitudes and behaviours. (*Please refer to sections 2.7.4 & 2.7.2, pp.40-41*).

Using RM approaches such as building closer relationships to support students and helping them to develop learning communities as they make the transition into PGT study can be beneficial in this way (Arnett et al.,2003).

6.4.2 Summary – Self phase

Based on the discussion in this section, the following RM factors can be identified as affecting personal change and impacting student identities. In answering RQ4, the RM factors identified include:

1) The development of a supportive learning environment which positively affects students' self-confidence and self-esteem.

2) Supporting students' academic and professional identity construction and satisfaction.

3) Supporting the development of salient identities through relationships and rapport building and through supportive learning communities.

In this section, the key RM factors that support students in this phase of transition have been identified as helping to develop and support their identities as postgraduate students. The link between RM factors and the development of salient identities in non-profit organisations, including HE has been outlined in the academic literature by Arnett et al. (2003). However, the link between

RM factors and student identity whilst undergoing transition has not been established in the literature before. This is the first academic study to do so.

6.5 Research question five

RQ5. How do programme and other support services affect students' experiences and satisfaction during transition?

In this section and to answer the fifth research question, which relates to the Support phase of transition, the key RM elements which impact on this phase will be discussed based on the literature and the research findings. In the conceptual framework, this phase was identified as the fourth S in the "moving through" phase of transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995) The literature in chapter two outlined the main transitional elements linked to the Support phase included: programme organisation and support, learning environment, facilities and social spaces. In this section the key RM factors that relate to this phase are identified and used as subheadings.

6.5.1 Service quality, value and satisfaction - Support phase

This study's empirical findings outline that the organisation of PGT programmes and services such as timetabling are, for many students, very important aspects in terms of planning their busy time schedules. In this study, students reported negative experiences relating to issues with their electronic timetable, which had become a source of great frustration for them. There were also issues for some students with setting up and finding the correct seminar groups and allocation of dissertation supervisors. According to the literature, any programme organisation issues need to be urgently addressed. Petruzzellis et al. (2006) considered that the student experience is about more than just teaching and learning services and activities. Other services provided by universities, which include course organisation, support services and activities etc. can also be very important in terms of student satisfaction, retention and successful programme completion. (*Please refer to section 2.8.1, p.41).*

Hesketh and Knight (1999) found that when students feel there is poor organisation and administration, this may reflect negatively on their programme outcomes and attitudes. Frustrated students can quickly become dissatisfied ones who may withdraw and/or pass on negative WOM feedback via social media.

Additional or supplementary services such as the payment of fees, campus facilities, staff attitudes, and accommodation are all important in facilitating the core service experience according to Ng and Forbes (2009). However, as important as these services are, the efficiency of supplementary services do not denote a good university experience for students per se, as they are considered by students

to be "hygiene" services. (Hertzberg, 1966; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2016). However, the students in the current study felt they were important for the university to get right.

The findings from this study reported that the respondents believed that some of the administrative issues they experienced could be overcome through the provision of more dedicated PGT programme support. They felt that a dedicated staff would pay more attention to their concerns and interests that were not currently being properly addressed. According to Rashid and Raj (2006), negative experiences can cause problems in relationships and lead to defection or withdrawal on the part of students. The findings from this study demonstrate that provision of dedicated administrative support would help the students to feel that they are being listened to and would prevent feelings of dissatisfaction with the service provided.

The empirical research from this study, outlined that the library was seen as offering comprehensive support to PGT learners, not only access to books. The Learning Development Centre (LDC) was also seen as a valuable resource providing an excellent service by those that used it, however not all students had used it, or intended to use it. In a study by West (2012) it was reported that PGT students tended to prefer subject specific support to be delivered by their module tutors. West (2012) also found that PGT students tended to dislike some support services on offer, as they were perceived as remedial. The findings from this empirical research do appear to agree with this viewpoint. The unwillingness to seek learning support, on the part of some PGT students, must be addressed as it could lead to student failure and withdrawal. Students need to be encouraged to access learning support as early as possible. Any notion of 'PGT students as student experts' (Tobbell and O'Donnell 2013) needs to be dispelled by HEIs because a potential mismatch between students' perceptions, expectations and their actual experiences could lead to their early withdrawal from programmes (Rowley et al., 2008). Those PGT students who accessed the learning services provided such as the LDC, reported their satisfaction with them.

Based on the findings from this research, it became evident that student respondents were almost overwhelmingly positive about the early support they received from the dedicated PGT careers service. PGT students were invited to attend many career related workshops and other events to aid their future employability. They felt there was also plenty of support available to them to secure short internships. One slight element of discontent voiced, was that the CV workshops were too UK centric in focus for the EU students in particular.

This research found that students were also satisfied, so far, with the level of support from their tutors and with the service they provided. The approachability and responsiveness of staff, whether module leaders, tutors, personal tutors or Programme Directors were felt to be really important for the students in terms of supporting their learning and in building supportive relationships. Ng and

Forbes (2009) commented about the construction of the core HE service, the interaction between students and academic staff, as key to student satisfaction. The importance of this relationship for any students feeling uncertain or anxious when transitioning to PGT studies is supreme. According to Smith (2006), many PGT students are now bearing in mind not only the academic reputation of HEIs but are also considering the level of support they can access, when deciding where to study.

The findings from this study outlined that respondents thought it would be better if PGT students could have their own dedicated learning facilities. This would comprise a suite of rooms for PGT students' sole use. They felt these rooms would be more suitable for their needs. When evaluating the trade-off between the benefits received and what they may be prepared to forego, it is the delivery process such as campus facilities, administrative procedures and physical infrastructure which seem important. (*Please refer to section 2.10.3.1, p.46*).

Ng and Forbes (2009) explained that HEIs have some control over the learners' environment. They felt HEIs should encourage the design of facilities and accommodation for students to encourage socialisation and create a more pleasant environment, rather than seeing them simply as support for learning activities. These so-called "servicescapes" (Bitner, 2013) which are the facilities within which the service is delivered and consumed, can be transformational in terms of a student's university experience. The mix of students within the university also contributes to their overall experience. Students from abroad may wish to interact with different nationalities, rather than with a more homogeneous population of students (Ng and Forbes, 2009). Many overseas students want to network with others from diverse cultural backgrounds (Edwards and Li, 2011). (*Please refer to section 2.6.4, p.38*).

 In this research it was found that the respondents wanted to have dedicated PGT student meeting spaces or common rooms where they could work on projects or simply socialise and network together.

Sapri et al. (2009) considered that important aspects that impact student's level of satisfaction with HEI services related to facilities management. Hesketh and Knight (1999) also felt that it was reasonable for PGT students to consider the facilities available at to them at university were important, because they would feel that insufficient facilities could adversely affect the quality of their work and hence the overall quality of the programme. Rooms for PGT students, which could include dedicated information technology facilities, were considered by students to be important quality aspects (Hesketh and Knight, 1999)*.* Hesketh and Knight's (1999) findings are fully supported by the results of this research.

In a study undertaken by Humphrey and McCarthy (1999), PGT students believed that their needs were different to those of UG students. They reported that PGT students:

"*wanted separate facilities and increased opportunities to meet with other postgraduates*" (p.13).

The findings from this research are similar to those from Humphrey and McCarthy's (1999) study. The PGT students did indeed see themselves as different to the UG students and wanted dedicated social spaces and facilities that demonstrated their status and would support their relationship building activities. The lack of dedicated room provision could be a source of potential dissatisfaction for PGT students.

For Helgesen (2008), the facilities and IT (information technology) available were considered to be vital in determining student value. The findings from this research saw students commenting favourably about the provision of IT facilities and other services available from the Hub. The ability to borrow laptops and to download software for free were particularly praised. (*Please refer to section 3.4.5, p.63).*

The findings from this research are similar to those reported in the most recent PTES report (Neves and Leman, 2019) which identified that HEIs scored highly in their provision of what were seen to be effective resources and services for PGT students. For example, the library, IT resources, subject-specific resources and information were all rated very highly (Neves and Leman, 2019). This was certainly the case for the PGT respondents in this study, who were satisfied with the service received. However, there were some areas of concern voiced by the PGT students which included their desire for dedicated PGT programme support. They felt that some of the issues they had with the e-timetable, finding seminar groups and problems with dissertation supervision needed to be addressed or they could become dissatisfied. They also felt that dedicated PGT learning spaces should be provided where they could work on projects, socialise and network would be invaluable.

6.5.2 Summary – Support phase

Based on the discussion and literature outlined in this section, and in answer to RQ5, university services and RM factors were identified by this study as affecting student experiences and satisfaction in the Support phase of transition. These service and RM factors included:

1) The quality and value of programme organisation and HEI administration services.

2) Student satisfaction (or potential dissatisfaction) with services provided, to include library, tutor and careers support.

3) Perceived quality of the learning environment or servicescape and the provision of dedicated spaces, IT and other facilities for PGT learners.

However, where the students perceived there to be a lack of suitable support, facilities or dedicated spaces, it was felt that this could become a source of potential dissatisfaction with the HEI, which if left unaddressed, could lead to possible student withdrawal from their PGT programmes. The application of various RM approaches listed above can be helpful in dispelling this situation in the early transitional phase. The findings presented and discussed here offer a new insight into how transition can be managed using RM approaches, which has not been provided in the academic literature before.

6.6 Research question six

RQ6. How do university services support ongoing successful relationships and transitions into employment for PGT alumni?

In this section and to answer the final research question, which relates to the post transition or graduation phase, the key RM elements that affect this phase are discussed, based on the literature, the conceptual framework and the research findings. The literature in chapter two outlined the main post transitional elements linked to this phase which included: post PGT careers support and employment services, post PGT experiences, activities and alumni services. In this section the key RM factors that relate to this phase are identified and used as subheadings.

6.6.1 Loyalty, commitment and reputation development – Post transition phase

The findings of this research outlined that the activities provided by alumni to current PGT students were seen as inspirational and provided a high level of perceived added value to the programme experience. The student respondents felt that by networking with alumni they could learn more about how they could make themselves stand out with potential employers. According to Artess et al. (2014) informal networks could be developed between employers, academic staff, alumni and PGT students to support them post PGT transition and into the world of work. (*Please refer to section 3.4.2, p.63*).

Some HEIs support the transition of their alumni into employment by offering them post-graduation a careers service. However, this research (in study three) found that most PGT students were not fully clear about any specific career services provided by the HEI to them post-graduation. Only one student commented on this and felt it was a very valuable service. (*Please refer to section 2.10.4.1, p. 47).*

According to a study by Bowman (2005), there are generally fewer resources made available to alumni for careers guidance as a particular, separate student group. However, the findings from this study do not wholly agree with those of Bowman (2005). Whilst the service was made available, not many students knew about it. It is important that all PGT students are informed about the career services on offer to them both before and once they graduate. It is a valuable service and one that helps an HEI maintain an ongoing relationship with its alumni

Many of the PGT student respondents in this study expressed that had developed great loyalty and affinity towards the university, and as alumni, they would be keen to support new students, to network and share their experiences with them. An example of this was from Respondent XB (Overseas student) who said,

> *"If I have the chance, I would be glad to have links with the university. I would be happy to help and support other students."*

Arnett et al. (2003) explained that HEIs can provide plenty of opportunities to strengthen ties to the university with their alumni post-graduation. They can utilise alumni as invited speakers, role models and mentors to help to widen the horizons of their PGT students and facilitate future possibilities for them. (*Please refer to section 2.9.1, p.43*).

The respondents in this research mostly reported that they would be keen to become alumni once they had graduated. They reported feeling committed and loyal to the HEI and wanted to give something back to help other students. For example, as Respondent AV (EU student) said,

> *"Becoming an alumna of the university would be my wish. I feel committed to this university and it's always a good opportunity to keep a strong relationship and especially with X university because I spend one year here. It's one of the most important years for me. It would be good to give something back."*

Lui and Jia (2008) found that the students' experience influences their ongoing perceptions and feelings towards the HEI and on graduating, any ongoing interactions can increase the strength of any links they have with the HEI (Farrow and Yuan, 2011). In their study, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) posited that student loyalty can be conceptualised as an attitude most usually demonstrated when alumni recommend their university to other prospective students.

The findings from this empirical research appear to concur with Hennig-Thurau et al.'s (2001) viewpoints. It is important for HEIs to encourage and support long term relationships with graduating PGT students, particularly those satisfied and committed ones. (*Please refer to sections 3.4.8 & 3.4.9, pp. 65-66).*

The relationship an HEI has with its students has the possibility to lead to positive reputation development in the HE marketplace (Yang et al., 2008).

6.6.2 Alumni WOM and influence – Post transition phase

In this research study it was found that loyal students (as alumni) would be happy to have ongoing contact and provide support to the HEI, by acting as visiting lecturers, or by helping to offer provide placements for students, or through their positive WOM (or eWOM) recommendations. (However, it seems likely that only those delighted with the service would promote it to prospective students (Reichheld, 2003). Indeed, this study outlines that customer satisfaction is the key RM variable in securing their ongoing patronage. (*Please refer to 3.4.6, p.64*).

Although not explicitly stated in this research, students may also be prepared in the future to offer financial support to the HEI through donations. Hennig -Thurau et al. (2001) considered that post-graduation, students could help their university financially through their support for research projects or via donations. This fact has not been established by this study, however.

6.6.3 Summary – Post transition phase

It is clear from the discussion of findings and literature considered in this section, and in answer to RQ6, that university services do successfully support long term relationships and transitions into employment for students in the post PGT transition phase using key RM factors. The RM factors identified in this phase include:

1) Providing a high level of perceived added value to students through alumni networks and activities.

2) Encouraging and supporting long term relationships with satisfied, committed and loyal PGT students as alumni.

3) Offering career services to alumni to maintain links and provide ongoing employment support.

4) Maintaining links through ongoing communications with alumni to encourage them to become influencers and ambassadors for the HEI, particularly through their WOM endorsements. These endorsements help to support and build the university's reputation as outlined in the conceptual framework.

In this section it has been discussed that graduating PGT students are likely to become supportive alumni if they are satisfied with the service provided by the university. Through the use of RM approaches, alumni may become influential in reputation development through positive WOM

communications and encouraging prospective students to join the university's programmes. They may also support the university as guest speakers or as donors.

The application of RM is not a new concept linked to the alumni stage in the literature, as Arnett et al. (2003) considered the importance of generating successful relationships with alumni in HE through RM in their study into identity salience and RM success. However, Arnett et al. (2003) did not identify the HEI relationship with its alumni in the context of transition.

6.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the research questions presented in the previous chapter by aligning and comparing the empirical findings from this research, comprising three qualitative studies. The studies were undertaken with two groups of transitioning PGT students and one group of UG students about to embark on PGT studies. This chapter identified how RM factors and other marketing approaches, identified in the literature review and outlined in the conceptual framework in chapter three, could be applied to support PGT students at each stage of their transition journey, from the pre-transition phase moving through the four main transition phases to the post-transition, graduation phase. These RM factors, and other marketing aspects, have been identified as having an important influence and impact at each stage of the students PGT transitional journey as highlighted in the conceptual framework. These findings constitute new knowledge, as RM approaches have not been identified as having an impact on PGT students' transition before.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

7.0 Introduction

To conclude the thesis, this chapter will revisit the overall aim and objectives of the thesis outlining how these were met through the literature reviewed and the qualitative research undertaken. It will then consider the contribution of this research in section 7.1. The limitations of the research are presented in section 7.2, followed by directions for future research in section 7.3. A summary of the chapter follows at section 7.4.

The aim of this thesis has been to explore the issues around students' transition to PGT programmes, and to discover, through the use of a relationship marketing approach, how their recruitment, retention, satisfaction, commitment and long-term loyalty to the HEI can be ensured. In order to meet this overall research aim, the following objectives for this study were formulated:

- To examine the context and process within which transitioning students' motivations and choices of university and PGT programme are influenced using RM approaches.

- To ascertain how PGT students' expectations, experiences and self - identities are influenced during the transition process by RM approaches.

- To determine which RM factors and strategies support transitioning PGT students towards satisfactory employment outcomes and long-term relationships with the university.

It can be demonstrated that the aims and objectives of this research have been met through the findings of the empirical research in the application of an exploratory, qualitative case study research design.

The aim and objectives of this study have been met through a detailed review of the transition and student experience literature in chapter two, which outlined the transition process using Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) transition theory. A detailed review of the transition and related student experience literature culminated in an adapted version of the model for transition, presented at the end of chapter two.

Due to the importance of relationship building between HEIs and students during the PGT transition process, the RM factors impacting students' transition journey were identified in the literature in chapter three. The review of the RM literature together with the adapted model of transition culminated in a combined adapted conceptual framework for PGT transition based on both the Schlossberg et al. (1995) model and Hennig-Thurau et al.'s (2002) Integrative Model of the

Determinants of Key RM Outcomes. This new conceptual framework links together the key transitional stages together with the six research questions identified at each stage of the conceptual framework. The RM factors that can affect and are affected by the various transitional stages were also identified.

The six research questions were answered through the application of an exploratory research approach, collecting qualitative data through three case studies via 46 qualitative interviews with 44 students and 2 staff members. The process of data collection was described in chapter four with the results being analysed via a thematic analysis approach using NVivo 12 software. The research findings were reported in detail in chapter five.

In chapter six, the findings were synthesised and discussed in relation to both the transition and RM literature and the implications and recommendations based on these findings are outlined in the following section of this chapter at 7.2.

7.1 Contributions of this research

This thesis contributes to the theoretical body of research on student transition by identifying the key phases of the transition process and the elements of RM that impact upon each stage of the PGT students' transition journey. Few research studies have investigated student transition to PGT study, which is surprising, given the importance of PGT students to the UK HE sector.

Figure 2.2 (refer to page 49) shows the adapted conceptual model which was developed based on the Schlossberg et al. (1995) Model of Transition and the review of the transition literature in chapter two. In the chapter transition was conceptualised using Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) model as having 3 main stages, the Pre-transition (or moving in) phase, the Transition or (moving through) phase and the Post- transition (or moving out) phase. At each phase, the key aspects affecting students' transition were identified from the literature. Whilst other studies, predominately from the US, have applied Schlossberg et al.'s model to a variety of educational experiences (notably, Flowers, 2014; Schaefer, 2010; Tovar and Simon, 2006; Goodman and Pappas, 2000) no other studies to date have developed an adapted framework mapping PGT students' transition experience specifically.

Figure 3.2 (refer to page 72) shows the adapted conceptual framework which outlines the RM factors that impact upon each stage of the PGT students' transition journey. This new framework for PGT student transition links together the key stages of PGT transition, identified in the literature together with RM factors. This approach has been developed in order to ensure successful transitional outcomes for both PGT students and successful strategies for the HEI, using key RM factors to build and maintain long term mutually beneficial relationships between the parties. This research

therefore provides new learning in terms of the PGT transition experience and in the application of RM approaches within the HE sector. The RM factors identified include trust (or confidence benefits) perceived value, special treatment benefits, rapport (or social benefits), service quality, student satisfaction, loyalty, commitment reputation and positive WOM communication.

This research highlights important implications for the HE sector, as it has been shown that PGT transition issues need to be addressed given the potential impact on student retention and attrition rates. In the following section, some implications for HEI management are discussed and practical recommendations for PGT transition are presented.

7.2 Implications and recommendations of this research

Based on the research findings from chapter 5 and discussions of the literature and findings in chapter 6, implications for HEIs can be identified and various recommendations for the management of PGT student transition by HEIs can be made.

7.2.1 Importance of WOM, agents and social media

Based on the findings of this research, students are most heavily influenced in their choices of university and PGT programmes via, what they believe, are the more credible word of mouth (WOM) or e-WOM recommendations from their friends, family, peers and even tutors from other institutions (Le et al., 2020). It is also vital that HEIs also build strong relationships with overseas based agents in terms of them recommending students to apply to the university for PGT study. This is because agents are a key source of information for overseas based students (Havergal, 2015).

According to Sweeney et al. (2008) there is increasing use made of eWOM posting together with more traditional WOM, by students. It has higher levels of credibility as a source of information for them (Bickart and Schindler 2001).

Based on the findings from this research, it can be seen that as students increasingly rely on social media for information about PGT study, it is important that HEIs ensure that more PGT information is available to prospective students across a variety of communication channels, particularly social media and via overseas agents.

7.2.2 Invest and use CRM and early communications

Early communication from HEIs with applicants to its PGT programmes is strongly recommended based on the findings from this research. Supplying detailed and timely information to students is clearly critical when they are making decisions about whether to apply to a particular university (Campbell and Narduzzi, 2015). This assists in building an early relationship and establishing a

rapport with prospective PGT students (University of Leeds, PGT Transition Programme Report, 2015).

Investment in a CRM database to support this activity can be usefully deployed to store details of all applicants and to send out automated university communications that may be of interest (Solomon et al., 2019). Based on the findings of this research therefore, it can be recommended that personalised information is sent from HEIs to prospective PGT students as welcome letters and pre-arrival information are highly regarded by them.

7.2.3 Manage the reputation and brand image of the HEI

The findings from this research show that students are crucially influenced in their choice of where to do PGT studies by the brand image and reputation of the university. It is therefore critical for HEIs to maintain their external accreditations and rankings wherever possible, as these have a major impact on their global reputations and brand image (Donaldson and McNicholas, 2004). It appears that the reputation of an HEI supports the development of RM factors such as trust and confidence benefits amongst its prospective home and international students. Teaching excellence (evidenced, for example, by achieving TEF Gold) as explained by Morgan (2013) and an HEI's reputation for graduate employability are both considered to be substantial influencing factors on students' choice of university in the pre-transition stage.

The value of holding a PGT qualification is an important message that HEIs need to communicate to UG students about to graduate, particularly to those UG students unlikely to gain a first or 2.1 classification for their bachelor's degree. For some students, the possibility to undertake a PGT programme at a university with a good reputation and strong brand (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2016), it can provide an opportunity for some students to "trade up", as they see it, and obtain a master's level qualification from a more prestigious university.

Overseas based students articulated that obtaining a UK PGT degree was perceived as having prestige in the employment market in their home countries. These students felt that it bestowed a great deal of value upon the qualification holder above the cost that was paid for the PGT programme. The students felt the trade-off between what they paid and what they received was fair and hence had a favourable impression of the HEI and were proud of its prestige factor (Teeroovengadum et al., 2019). This finding makes clear a key message that HEIs should use to market their programmes effectively to overseas students via their agents and other communication media.

7.2.4 Differentiate subject offerings

In terms of choice of programme offerings, it is crucial that HEIs continue to offer a broad range of subject specialisms and conversion programmes at PGT level in order to maximise their offerings to a larger number of heterogeneous student segments. According to this research, it is clearly important for prospective PGT students that universities continue to offer these programmes. Applying the principles of segmentation and those of target marketing are highly appropriate in competitive markets comprising consumers with diverse needs (Kara and Kaynak, 1997; Kotler, 2003).

Some of the students in this this research clearly felt that they needed to focus on specific areas that would help them to gain future employment as managers or to help them start up their own businesses. It seems that PGT programmes need to demonstrate elements of work-related practicality, include internships and links to industry wherever possible. According to Helmsley-Brown and Oplatka (2015) this is an appropriate marketing strategy which allows for broader competitive positioning in the PGT market. Therefore, it is recommended that in terms of their competitive positioning, HEIs should highlight their PGT offerings to include a broader range of specialist, more generalist and conversion programmes.

7.2.5 Provide special treatment benefits

Programme fees and living costs are seen to be important influences on students' choices and motivations to transition into PGT study in this research. The introduction of student loans for PGT students has been a key factor in the recent observed increase in home based PGT students enrolling for UK based programmes (HESA, 2021). It appears that the UK PG loan policy supports students from backgrounds less able to access other financial means, which will increase demand for PGT study (Mateos-Gonzalez and Wakeling, 2020). The provision of scholarships was found to be another factor that attracted students to enrol for PGT programmes.

Loyalty discounts in fees for continuing UG students undertaking PGT study at the same university offer so-called "special treatment benefits" (Gwinner and Gremler, 2015). This is an important RM factor, which was found in this research to be important in influencing students' choice of university. In addition, the lower living costs of cities such as Birmingham, when compared with the costs of living in London, can be an important motivator for remaining with the university. The location of the campus was also mentioned as a key influencing factor. The perception of a safe campus according to both home based and overseas students was imperative. This research recommends that HEIs keen to encourage students loyal to the university to continue to PGT study from their UG programmes, need to consider the use of special treatment benefits such as discounts on fees and scholarships.

7.2.6 Manage student expectations through dialogue and trust

This research found that as students move through into the first phase of their transition journey into their chosen PGT studies, they expressed certain expectations about the programme and early experiences in relation to their learning and changes to their self-identities as PGT students. The failure of HEIs to meet the service expectations of students could exacerbate problems related to student retention (Dailey, et al. 2006).

Many students in the studies expressed that they had mixed feelings at the start of their PGT programmes, with some students feeling nervous, anxious and scared. This research suggests that HEIs therefore need to try to mitigate these concerns and feelings of nervousness about PGT transition by ensuring that students are made fully aware about what to expect and by supporting students once on their programmes (Coneyworth et al., 2019). The overseas (mainly Chinese) respondents in this research worried about the possibility of failing their PGT programmes and letting down their families who were supporting them financially. Communication to build dialogue and trust with students about the support available is recommended as beneficial in establishing a good rapport with students in the early stages of their programmes (Owen and Loomes, 2010).

Some students were concerned that they would receive less learning support whilst on a PGT programme compared to a UG degree. HEIs should address any concerns about a perceived lack of support at an early stage of the programme in their communications with students as recommended by Heussi (2013). However, as found in this research, it appears that some students require encouragement to make use of the support on offer. This concern needs to be addressed particularly with overseas students who have to get used to very different systems compared to those in their home countries' universities, use of different pedagogy and learning in English, a second language for them (Liu, 2009). It is important that HEIs encourage those students, in transition to PGT programmes, to access learner support early on in their programmes to prevent dissatisfaction, failure or possible programme withdrawal.

Those students, who had undertaken a pre-master's or pre-sessional programme, reported that they felt better prepared when starting their PGT programmes because this is exactly what these programmes are designed to do. Not all students felt that they were fully prepared for PGT studies, however. They were somewhat unsure what to expect whilst on their programmes. As Heussi (2013) suggests, students' concerns and nervousness about PGT study can be dispelled by ensuring that they are made fully aware about what to expect through programme induction and signposting to early support and intervention provided. As this research suggests, some HEIs would do well to heed these student concerns and consider offering pre-sessional and/or pre-master's programmes and more detailed induction programmes.

7.2.7 Provide confidence benefits to build loyalty

This research suggests that HEIs need to take a more proactive stance in terms of preparing all transitioning students for their PGT studies. This can be developed early on in the process by providing starter packs to students. This provides students with what Hennig-Thurau et al., (2002) describe as confidence benefits, which are the benefits students enjoy as a result of the reduced anxiety and risk experienced when they engage in a service, due to the relationship with and trust they have with that organisation. An example of this can be explained as having a sense of knowing what to expect according to Gwinner and Gremler (2015).

Competition in the HE sector means that universities need to try to maintain student loyalty (Pham and Lai, 2016). The findings from this research therefore suggest that university management can ensure loyalty behaviours by improving students' perceptions of the image of, value of and their satisfaction with the HEI, through the development of confidence benefits.

7.2.8 Provide excellent service quality and servicescapes

The feedback from students in this research, on their early transitional experiences with support services such as the library, LDC, careers, tutor support and IT services were mostly overwhelmingly positive. Aspects of the service quality were praised for being efficient and well organised. The respondents explained however, that they also felt it would be better if HEIs could provide PGT students with their own learning facilities, such as provision of a suite of rooms for PGT students sole use. They also felt that dedicated meeting rooms or a PGT common room would help them to work together on projects and to allow them to socialise and network together better. The servicescapes (Bitner, 2012) are the facilities within which the university service is delivered and can be an important factor in terms of a student's university experience. This could be a key area for HEIs to consider in terms of the provision of resources to PGT students. In a recent PTES report (Neves and Leman, 2019) however, it was identified that many HEIs already scored highly in their provision of what were seen to be effective resources to PGT students.

Bitner et al. (2013) suggest that service blueprinting is helpful in mapping out all activities and interactions that support and help to co-create the student experience. This can assist an HEI in understanding and improving its service processes. According to Rashid and Raj (2006), negative experiences can cause problems in relationships and lead to defection or withdrawal. In this research, the organisation of PGT programmes and administration services such as timetabling for students, are seen as very important aspects in terms of planning their learning. Difficulties with programme organisation can be a source of great frustration for them. Therefore, based on these findings, it is suggested any service failure issues need to be addressed urgently by the HEI, since

frustrated students can quickly become dissatisfied ones who may withdraw and/or pass on negative WOM feedback via social media.

7.2.9 Improve student satisfaction

Alves and Raposo (2007 identified that satisfaction bred loyalty and that students who were satisfied were more committed and loyal to the institution and more likely to support alumni activities and maintain an ongoing positive relationship with their former university. Senior et al. (2017) found that providing high quality teaching was an important factor in maintaining student satisfaction.

In this research it was found that many non-European, international students are not used to the student-centred, self-directed PGT learning approaches used in most UK universities. This is where students are expected to become more autonomous, independent learners, rather than the lecturer being central to their learning. At PGT level, the expectation in the UK is to engage students in co-creation of learning, in order that they can bring their own experiences to the class (Bamber et al., 2017). As Bitner et al. (2012) explain, value in service provision of HE is co-created, not delivered to students and therefore it is the role of tutors, administrators, managers and others, to facilitate educational value co-creation. The value of HE is perceived by students during their educational experience and later, once they are able to put their learning to use (Bitner et al., 2012).

This research found that whilst some students do enjoy the sense of greater self-directedness, these tended to be the UK based students. Others may have problems in making the adjustment to the demands of this style of learning. It is therefore suggested, in agreement with Heussi's (2013) study that international PGT students may need a more detailed programme induction and signposting to early support and intervention.

In this research, the students also reported that they found group work to be difficult. There were some issues with language barriers preventing participation within diverse cultural groups. It seems that many overseas students find it hard to participate in group debates and team-based exercises as Holmes, (2005) reported. It is recommended from this research therefore, that HEIs need to provide additional support with language for PGT students because there is often an expectation for students to work together in mixed cultural teams, particularly in business and management PGT programmes.

7.2.10 Encourage student socialisation

This research found that HEIs can assist students through transition via the development of various support strategies such as encouraging the development of communities of practice (CoPs) and offering networking events and activities, as recommended by O'Donnell et al. (2009). This could

prevent service dissatisfaction and possible programme withdrawal by students through the HEI building a rapport with them and providing social benefits. Socialisation is an important element in supporting students' transition into the postgraduate environment as it helps them to develop their self-confidence and feeling more able to join in (Menzies and Baron, 2014). It should ideally start early on in the programme so that good working relationships can be set up and students can feel they "belong" in an environment of openness and trust according to Matheson and Sutcliffe (2018). Events can provide opportunities for students to develop their wider cultural capital through contacts with other students from a variety of diverse backgrounds as Wu (2014) suggests. In this study, students felt networks provided social and emotional support via their peers, which is to be encouraged.

It is important that students' early achievements are celebrated and the programme content helps them to develop their sense of professionalism and satisfaction as endorsed by Good and Adams (2008). The findings from thesis recommend that HEIs need to offer a supportive learning environment and CoPs together with academic achievement recognition that provides transitioning students with positive identity construction, growth in self confidence and self-esteem. Students need to be able to develop a rapport with each other and HEI staff to strengthen their social and emotional support strategies.

7.2.11 Encourage alumni support

In the final phase of transition, this research outlined students' opinions on the provision of services and RM activities provided post PGT graduation. These were felt to be helpful in supporting satisfactory employment outcomes and long-term relationships with the university. As Arnett et al. (2003) explained, HEIs can provide many opportunities to strengthen ties to the university with their alumni post-graduation. Alumni can be asked to become invited speakers, role models and mentors to help to widen the horizons of their PGT students and facilitate future possibilities for them.

In the studies, the students felt that they wished to remain linked to the university by becoming active alumni. They were also happy to act as influencers through WOM or eWOM communications on behalf of the university. This finding agrees with Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) who reported that student loyalty can be conceptualised as an attitude most usually demonstrated when alumni recommend their university to other prospective students.

Satisfied students are more likely remain loyal and committed to the university through the provision of post university services, such as career services and are more likely to become alumni themselves. This research therefore recommends that HEIs offer post university services such as careers advice and that they utilise their CRM databases to keep in contact with their alumni to provide suitable and

tailored communications with them. As Yang et al. (2008) explained, the relationship an HEI has with its students can lead to positive reputation development in the HE marketplace. Alumni can become trusted brand ambassadors on behalf of the HEI.

7.3 Limitations of the research

This research study is informed by its aim and research objectives, adopted theory, two literature reviews and research questions, which have been outlined in the earlier chapters. As a consequence, the research exploration and data analysis presented in the subsequent chapters determined and restricted the scope of this study. Four limitations have been identified, which provide a context within which to interpret the research findings.

The first limitation is the fact that the research was conducted at one UK Business School in a Birmingham based university. This means that the qualitative findings from the three case studies are only applicable to the Business School studied and are therefore not necessarily generalisable, according to Yin (2003), to the general HE transition experiences of PGT students found at other Business Schools in the UK. However, the use of the 44 face-to face semi-structured interviews were valuable for this exploratory study, as they provided detailed data to support understanding of the transition experience from the students' perspective. The rich, descriptive qualitative data were triangulated using secondary, electronic, pre-published data and two professional discussions with key university staff (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As this research assumed an interpretivist research philosophy, Guba (1981) argued that the use of the positivist criteria of internal and external validity and reliability, should be replaced with the four criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity instead. These criteria include credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability which are well accepted by scholars in the field of educational research (e.g. Merriam, 1998; Silverman, 2000). Care was taken by the researcher to adhere to these criteria.

The second limitation is the fact the research was conducted using only Business School respondents. Had the study been broadened out to include students from other discipline areas, the findings could have been rather different. However, this research was specifically focussed upon transition issues amongst PGT students on Business and Management programmes.

The third limitation is the use of qualitative methods to collect exploratory data. It could be argued that the use of a multi method approach to gather both qualitative and quantitative data would improve validity of this research. The findings may have been different if a survey had been conducted with a larger number of students or additional qualitative approaches had been adopted. However, these alternative approaches were rejected as this research was exploratory and so a qualitative approach was felt to be more appropriate in these circumstances. According to Robson

(2002), in exploratory research the application of in-depth and semi structured interviews are most suited to the discovery of what is happening and to find new insights, as was the case in this research. For this thesis the intention was to develop a conceptual framework for PGT student transition using RM factors, as one had not been developed before, rather than to test it quantitatively.

Fourthly, the data, although collected with 3 cohorts of students, were only collected at one point in time using a mainly cross sectional rather than longitudinal approach (Saunders et al., 2019). During the early weeks of the transition with the PGT students and with the UG students, at the end of their bachelor's degree studies, prior to their transition to a PGT programme. Had the data been collected at other points in time and more than once with each cohort, the data may have yielded different findings. However, the cross-sectional approach was used for this study because the researcher was seeking to describe the occurrence of a particular phenomenon, i.e. students' transition experiences to PGT study and what students felt about it at that point in time.

7.4 Directions for future research

The results of this research have provided data which relate to students' expectations of and experiences of PGT transition in 2016/17 and 2017/18. Based on the outcomes of this research and the development of the conceptual framework for student transition using RM factors, the next steps would be to test the framework quantitatively using a survey.

As the recent pandemic has necessitated many changes to PGT provision, including the requirement for all UK HEIs to all but abandon face to face teaching and learning practices for over a year, in favour of solely offering online learning since 2020. It would be useful to understand how these changes, which had to be imposed very suddenly, impacted on the students' PGT transition experience and how they adapted and coped with the changes. It would be interesting to explore whether the same RM factors can be applied to manage the transition process on the part of HEIs post Covid.

7.5 Summary

It is strongly recommended that universities apply the RM factors discussed in this chapter, to support their students throughout the three key phases their PGT transition journey, as outlined in the conceptual framework (Figure 3.2). The PGT transition journey and its key phases were defined via the academic literature on student transition and the student experience, in chapter two. The RM factors impacting the transition process were identified via the RM literature in chapter three, which includes the adapted conceptual model. The findings of this research were outlined in chapter five

and further discussed in chapter six. To conclude, this chapter has outlined how universities can develop strategies to promote long term supportive relationships with their transitioning PGT students.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Literature table for Chapter 2 – Research articles exploring student transition to PGT programmes from 1999 - 2021 (in alphabetical order)

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Artess et al. (2014)	Mixed	The analysis of data included examination of HESA Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) data to examine the outcomes of graduates of PGT courses. In addition, an online survey was designed to capture employers' views of the particular value of postgraduates and the nature of their collaboration with HEIs.	The aim of this study was to address the information gap around employer engagement with PGT provision and specifically, the extent to which universities were already collaborating with employers in PGT programme design and delivery methods.
Bamber et al. (2019)	Quantitative	A questionnaire was designed by disaggregating the proposed framework into a set of statements. 204 students returned questionnaires, representing approximately 17% of the university's PGT population.	This Scottish based project reported that transitions are increasingly recognised to be difficult and less has been written about transitions to PGT programmes than about UG transitions. It found that new PGT students and staff teaching them, can be unclear about what is expected at this level and proposed a framework to indicate how students can be expected to engage with master's level study.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Bowman (2005)	Qualitative	24 in depth interviews with students from six PGT courses from two universities led to the development of a classification to review students' circumstances on entry to their PGT programmes.	This paper explored decision-making amongst students starting full time UK taught PGT programmes. Little previous work considered these students and their transition to PGT from UG studies. The complications within the students' decision-making process seemed to be unlike the notion of students as coherent actors seeking simply pecuniary gains.
Briggs et al. (2012)	Mixed methods	Two studies of student transition in UK using student and staff surveys, student focus groups, staff focus groups, staff interviews and staff–student conferences. The article offered a model of the process of UG transition and the formation of learner identity.	This study explored challenges in supporting student transition from school or college to university. It examined the complex contacts needed for students to progress to appropriate courses, fit into university life and succeed as higher education learners
Brown (2007)	Literature review	A review of the relevant literature.	This study considered key issues with supervising international PGT students at the dissertation stage of their programmes. The difficulties of time pressure, language problems, a lack of critical analysis and personal problems for these students were discussed.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Clarke (2018)	Literature review and conceptual model	The literature focuses primarily on human capital aspects, such as knowledge and skills, and the processes by which they can be acquired and enhanced. In contrast the broader employability literature tends to focus on individual variables (such as personality, attitudes and career-related behaviours), labour market variables and current employment status.	This study draws upon the employability literature to develop a framework which incorporates six key dimensions – human capital, social capital, individual attributes, individual behaviours, perceived employability and labour market factors – to help explore and explain the concept of graduate employability.
Cluett and Skene (2006)	Quantitative	Online surveys were undertaken at the end of 2004 and 2005 to gather demographic data and to gauge student opinion on a range of issues related to their PCW experience. The survey was distributed to all students who commenced PCW studies in 2004 and 2005. 120 responses were received in 2004 and 62 in 2005.	This research considered the issues surrounding the Postgraduate Course Work (PCW) student experience. Research to date tended to focus issues associated with transition. The study highlighted some broader issues prevalent in Australia. Barriers to best practice were related to identity/status, representation and administrative issues. Recommendations were made with regard to clearer marketing, induction and orientation events, provision of a geographical and institutional home and the communication of university goals to staff.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Coates and Dickenson (2012)	Mixed methods	A three-year action research strategy using mixed methods was adopted. Three surveys (in 2007: n = 238; in 2008: n = 126; in 2009: n = 151; population ca. 300) were administered in a lecture theatre during induction week. Students were asked a series of questions which were explained by the researchers as they were displayed on the screen.	This study outlines that international postgraduate students are important to the HE sectors in many countries. Students arrive from all over the world with diverse cultures and prior experiences. It was found that students' prior learning experiences and needs covered a wide spectrum. The data collected were used to inform the design and implementation of an induction and learning support programme to accommodate heterogeneous groups of PG students and improve their engagement in learning.
Coneyworth et al. (2019)	Quantitative	A PGT student experience survey was completed. The sample consisted of 70% from an international background, 37% were males and 60% were females.	This study describes how UK based PGT students have only a limited timeframe. Most full-time programmes require concentrated scholarship, over a 12-month period. Many students face issues and concerns with their transition as they adapt the new learning situation with higher academic expectations. This study reports on the introduction of a new support programme in response to student feedback, providing a targeted support framework.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Donaldson and McNicholas (2004)	Quantitative	Primary data were gathered from students and potential students at one institution — Aberdeen Business School (ABS), a faculty within the Robert Gordon University (RGU). Survey analysed the responses from 102 students.	This research examined why PGT students in the UK decided to take up a further degree, the factors influencing their choice of programme and institution and the sources of information they consulted. The improvement of career prospects appeared to be the prime motivator and the need to gain or update skills to become more employable. Students also chose to study for their own personal satisfaction. Accreditation of programmes was a determining factor influencing their choice of institution. The reputation of the university was also important.
Drennan and Clarke (2009)	Quantitative	A cross-sectional survey of graduates who completed a thesis as part of their coursework master's degree. The first part of the study measured graduates experience of research and research supervision. The second part of the study, measured the relationships between student's demographic characteristics, educational experiences and the development of research skills.	This study measured graduates' experience of research and research supervision following the completion of a master's degree. It outlined that a coursework master's degree is becoming the principal conduit for the delivery of continuing education to the professions, it is one of the least understood or researched academic levels in HE. This study also examined the relationship between coursework master's graduates' experience of research supervision, completing a research thesis and their development of research capabilities.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Egege and Kutieleh, (2004)	Qualitative	Student evaluation feedback was collected on critical thinking and argumentation workshops presented to four consecutive cohorts of international students. Four students were also interviewed to follow up.	This study outlined that internationalisation of Australian HEIs presented a challenge for student support services, in providing suitable academic support programmes to address culturally based academic variances. This support should be sensitive and inclusive and could contribute to international students' success.
Evans et al. (2019)	Qualitative	A total of 44 semi-structured interviews were conducted with international PGT students at a UK based university.	This study explored the experiences of international students studying in the UK regarding their transition from UG to PGT study, the issues they faced and the factors that supported their transition. Students reported initially struggling with the academic demands and consequently developed peer support networks. The implications for HEIs particularly concerning pre-course preparation and ongoing structured support were also considered.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Flowers et al. (2014)	Qualitative	Twelve male transfer student athletes from a US Midwestern Division I university were interviewed regarding their transition experience.	This US based study examined "transfer student" athletes' perceptions of their transition experience. Studies of student athletes tend to usually focus on "traditional" student athletes who register with colleges directly from high school. Schlossberg's Transition Theory was used as the conceptual framework for this study and the findings suggested that this provided a pertinent framework to examine the transition experience of these student athletes.
Gbadamosi (2018)	Quantitative	A combination of 4 focus group discussions and thirteen individual interviews were conducted with 38 overseas students at a post 1992 London-based university during the 2013-2014 academic session.	This research explored the acculturation issues of overseas students in the UK at London-based university. It outlined the challenges faced by the students to include culture shock, discrimination and limited opportunities for interpersonal relationships. The study outlines how the issues could be addressed. It offers HEIs strategic directions for creating value for their target students in the highly competitive HE sector.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Good and Adams, (2008)	Quantitative	Participants included 765 first-year students at a university in southern Ontario, Canada.	In this study, an Eriksonian conceptual model was tested using SEM, linking academic social environments (relationships with faculty and fellow students), ego-identity formation, ego virtues, and academic success. It was found that social environments that are friendly, supportive, and encouraging of young people's independence were found to be conducive.
Hesketh and Knight (1999)	Qualitative	The first study presented in outline, consisted of an exploratory investigation of the information materials that some UK higher education institutions have provided about taught master's programmes in three subject areas. The second study centres upon a set of focus group interviews with students in both the UK and the USA.	This study comprises an exploration of the nature of demand for PGT information drawing upon two studies. The conclusion to the first study was that these documents frequently did not give sufficient information about academic and practical aspects of the programme. The main outcome from the second study was that applicants wanted contact with departments and current students. They were particularly keen to discover something of the "lived experience' of the programme, its personal and social character.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Heussi (2012)	Qualitative	Focus group interviews with two groups of PGT students at a UK based university. In order to lead the discussion in a general way, topics and questions were given to act as prompts.	The findings of this study indicated that students experienced difficulties with the transition into PGT study. These difficulties related to their external commitments and with the programme itself. The findings revealed that plenty that can be done by the university to aid students in their PGT transition.
Hounsell et al., (2005)	Mixed	An analysis of over 40 teaching quality assessment (TQA) reports from a cross-section of departments in five subject areas, and follow-up telephone interviews with key staff in 20 of those departments focusing on how high-quality learning was facilitated. These guided the development of questionnaires and interview schedules.	This report reviews the work of a project that investigated and enhanced UG programmes as teaching-learning environments (TLEs) in a cross-section of subjects and HEIs. The main findings were considered in relation to four main themes underpinning the project's work: high-quality undergraduate learning, undergraduate teaching-learning environments, evidence-informed pedagogical change, and subject requirements and practices.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
House (2010)	Mixed methods	Statistical data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). Some of it is available in their published annual reports Students in Higher Education and Destination of Leavers from Higher Education, but much of it was provided on special commission from HESA.	This study was commissioned to provide an overview of the PGT HE sector in the UK and brought together published data and reports in an expedient format highlighting key issues of interest to policymakers.
Humphrey and McCarthy (1999)	Quantitative	A postal questionnaire was sent to all full-time PGT students registered at the University of Newcastle in the academic year 1995/96. 636 students responded.	This study reported that as HEIs are developing strategies to grow their cohorts of PGT students, identifying their needs is of supreme importance. It establishes that the PGT population is not similar, and that academic and social provision needs to be developed with the differing needs of heterogeneous groups of PGT students in mind. The students who participated in this research felt that as PGs they should be allowed to have separate facilities and more favourable treatment than other student groups.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Jepsen and Neumann (2010)	Quantitative	The study was conducted twice in two years using approximately 120 students enrolled in a third year Behaviour in Organisations unit at a research-intensive UK university	This study examined the effect of a single semester on intentions to undertake postgraduate study. The results demonstrated no statistically significant change in students' PGT study destination intentions over the semester, despite deliberate encouragement intervention from faculty.
Kember et al. (2014)	Qualitative	Small focus group interviews were conducted with students at two research intensive universities in Hong Kong. Final-year undergraduate students were selected for the interview to review their experiences and to understand the nature of adjustment made by the students to cope with the transition	A study of the transition students make in adjusting their study behaviours acquired at school to ones more suited to university study. The context of this study was Hong Kong. The students tended to enter university accustomed to didactic teaching, reproductive approaches to learning and holding naïve epistemological beliefs.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Kingston and Forland (2008)	Qualitative	Four semi structured focus groups were conducted in the university's educational development centre. Access to the participants was obtained through directly contacting students enrolled in courses at the university. Volunteers for the focus groups included a mixture of undergraduate and postgraduate students from a variety of courses. Of these students, 25% were male and 75% were female, their ages ranging from 18 to 40 years.	This study considered the transition into HE in the UK of students from East Asian backgrounds. The data highlighted positive and negative aspects of their adjustment process and included many aspects that home students also find difficult. The results pointed focusing on good teaching practices for all, rather than for the development of extra measures for international students, which could highlight existing feelings of isolation from the social and academic worlds of UK HE.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Koenig-Lewis et al. (2016)	Quantitative	The results of a predominantly quantitative survey of 883 alumni.	This paper conceptualises the student experience as a" construction from memory" and brings forward previous discussions within the HE sector by distinguishing between recalled academic and social experience. The findings indicated that recalled academic experience has a greater effect on subsequent loyalty attitudes and behaviours than recalled social experience. The analyses indicated that alumni with strong ties with their university were more likely over time to identify with the recalled academic experience of their university, while those with weak ties were more likely to identify with recalled social experiences. Suggestions for the development of alumni associations were made based on targeting groups with different levels of ties with the university.
Lindley and Machin (2016)	Quantitative	Labour Force Survey (LFS) data for Britain, and Current Population Survey (CPS) data for the US, to show trends in employment shares for five year intervals over the last thirty years in five education categories.	This report revisits the debate about why social mobility levels are relatively low in UK and the US compared to other countries. The concluding observation was that the comparative work on social mobility highlights that the two countries studied - Britain and America - are low mobility nations.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Liu (2009)	Quantitative	A survey based approach was chosen for this research to support anonymity of the respondents. The questionnaire used both closed and open-ended questions.	This study outlines that the growth in international student numbers at many UK HEIs in recent years raises important questions about the presence of international students in the UK system. The study investigates how Chinese students on PGT marketing courses, learn in UK HE. The findings show that these students do respond to structured learning but are keen to adapt to more autonomous approaches. Their transition can be difficult, as many are affected by their cultural backgrounds and lack confidence with their language skills.
Liu (2010)	Quantitative	Primary data were collected from postgraduate marketing students at four British universities. Factor analysis is used to evaluate the convergent validity of the survey questionnaire and Cronbach's alpha coefficient to examine the internal consistency and reliability of the variables composing the major scales.	This study considered the motives, expectations and preparedness of students for PGT marketing study. It discussed possible suggestions for PGT marketing education in the UK. Results found that PGT marketing education expects a culturally varied student body coupled with their lack of relevant work experience. Students were found to have comparatively low perceptions of their preparedness for postgraduate study and high expectations in terms of support and the provision of practical experience in marketing.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Liu (2012)	Mixed	Primary data were collected from 30 postgraduate marketing alumni from eight countries using a questionnaire followed by structured interviews.	A pilot study exploring the value of a UK PGT marketing qualification. It examined alumni perceptions of their education and considered consequences for PGT marketing education. The results found that although alumni felt positive towards many aspects of their education they were less happy with the amount of practical marketing experience and quality of skills they developed.
Liu and Jia (2008)	Quantitative	A sample of 500 students in Hangzhou and Qingdao were surveyed and this generated 436 completed responses (87.2 percent).	This research considered the formation of students' loyalty to university brands from the viewpoint of a brand community in China. The findings of this study included the importance of fun based experiences to support students' university involvement. This appears to be a precondition for the formation of loyalty to university brand. Secondly the fun experiences support loyalty behaviour and loyalty attitudes at the same time. Finally, challenging experiences can bring about an attitude of loyalty.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Lobo and Gurney (2014)	Mixed	A mixed-methods approach was utilised, a survey with a combination of closed- and open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews.	This study was carried out to explore the expectations of an English language enhancement course (ELEC) with a group of UG students at an Australian university. The findings showed that the participants' expectations were largely met however, a lack of attendance was noted. Expectations were reported to have developed largely through consultation with previous students of the course and information provided by the university.
Lowe and Cook (2003)	Quantitative	Incoming students to the University of Ulster were surveyed prior to enrolment for their expectations of social and academic aspects of university. There were 2519 responses from undergraduate students	This study outlined that student study habits formed in secondary school continue into the first part of their UG university studies. Findings indicated that students tended not to fill the gap between school and university quickly and effectively. The transition into university life was managed by most successfully. However, some (20-30%) constantly experienced academic and personal problems.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Machin and Murphy (2010)	Quantitative	Data was used from HESA on all full-time students studying at HE institutions between the academic years 1994/1995 and 2011/2012, comprising 18.6 million individuals in total. This data were broken down across the following groups: 165 subject areas, 267 domiciles of origin, 3 levels of study, 2 fee statuses and 2 genders over 18 years.	This research reports that increased globalization of HE has occurred as more students from across the world now enrol in universities abroad. It considers the consequences of having more foreign students in the UK's HE system. The impact of growing numbers of international students and the number of domestic students were also considered.
Masterman and Shuyska (2012)		Extended email correspondence was conducted with 23 PGT students to investigate the extent to which these students start their courses both functionally competent in the use of IT and the relationship between students' engagement with digital technologies and their experience of transition to postgraduate study.	The findings of this study considered that PGT students had been largely disregarded in the research into learners' engagement with digital technologies. This UK based research sought to address this issue. It suggested that students could initially be less competent in IT than might be expected but use these tools in an informed manner. Engagement with a wider range of digital technologies parallels their shift from novice to expert practice and their developing self-concept as researchers; however, non-digital means also remain important in mediating all aspects of transition.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Mateos-Gonzalez and Wakeling (2020)	Quantitative	A large dataset of information on the destinations of all UK first-degree graduates between 2012/13 and 2016/17 was used in this study.	This study reported on the introduction of PGT study loans in 2016/17. The loans are intended to help those students without access to other financial resources in order to access PGT study. The results confirmed that overall enrolment rates increased in the year the loans were introduced. Also, the likelihood of progressing to a PGT programme across socio-economic groups had markedly improved with students from more disadvantaged groups attaining a similar rate to the more advantaged groups.
Matheson and Sutcliffe (2018)	Qualitative	A mixed qualitative methodology, was used to explore how to create a learning environment for students that valued diversity, required self-reflection and stimulated creative thinking, aided student transition to PGT study supporting their sense of belonging.	This research recognised that issues such as student identity, engagement and motivation were strongly affected by the students feeing of belonging. This research outlined how one cohort of international PGT business students were supported to create a sense of belonging and the outcomes that this had for them both as individuals and as a group.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Mattson and Barnes (2009)	Quantitative	A nationwide telephone survey of four-year accredited institutions on a University of Texas based list. In total 536 US universities and colleges participated in this survey.	This US based research revisited the admissions offices at institutions of HE one year after the first longitudinal study on college admissions and the use of new technologies. The findings supported what the earlier study documented that Colleges and universities were using social media to recruit and research prospective students. It was clear that online behaviour can have important consequences for young people and that social networking sites can, and will, be utilized to make decisions.
Mellors-Bourne et al. (2014)	Quantitative	An online survey was designed and implemented to investigate the motivations, information needs and decision-making of those considering a return to HE for PGT study. More than 1800 responses were gained.	The Careers Research & Advisory Centre (CRAC) and the International Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby conducted this project on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and other funding bodies. The study was conducted into the information needs of those considering PGT study.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Menzies and Baron (2014)	Qualitative	Australian based study using interview data collected from 48 students.	This study examined the experiences of international PGT student transition and focused upon student based rather than university-based support. Students experienced negative experiences in the beginning but made the adjustment eventually. Student societies proved beneficial in terms of social support and friendships.
Morgan (2014)	Quantitative	This paper contributes to the knowledge gap by identifying and comparing the growth in numbers of PG students in Australia, Canada, the USA and the UK.	This study outlined that the global growth in PGT study since the mid-1990s has been attributed to the expansion in PGT by coursework participation. It explores the possible drivers behind the growth and concludes by highlighting potential challenges facing the future of PG study across the sector.
Morgan (2015)	Quantitative	Questionnaires administered during orientation and induction period for new PGT students. The questions in the survey were developed as a result of the findings from PG surveys, focus group research and final-year undergraduate intentions surveys at a UK based university's School of Engineering.	This study reports on key findings from transitioning PGT students with different domiciled status, as there is lack of research about how prior study experiences and expectations of new students, due to embark on PGT study, can impact upon their ability to persist and succeed. The research highlighted the similarities and differences in prior study experiences and expectations of studying at PGT level between the UK, the EU and Non-EU-domiciled student respondents.

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Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Morgan and Direito (2016)	Quantitative	The Postgraduate Experience Project (PEP) was one of 20 projects funded through HEFCE's £25million Phase 1 Postgraduate Support Scheme. PEP was the largest consortium funded by HEFCE and comprised 11 universities (nine English [9E Group], one Welsh and one Scottish) geographically dispersed across the UK.	This large scale, multi institutional and stakeholder project provides, in light of the major changes in the UK HE environment, a valuable contribution in understanding, determining and supporting the PGT sector, at both institutional and national level.
O'Donnell et al. (2009)	Qualitative	A qualitative ethnographic methodology is used and the analysis revealed two themes: the heterogeneity of PG students, and the nature of PG teaching and learning.	This study explores transition to PGT study in terms of the widening participation (WP) agenda. This research considers a Communities of Practice framework, allowing for explanations of transition in terms of learning, identity and participation in practices.
Owens and Loomes (2010)	Quantitative	A survey of 446 international students was conducted. They had access to enhanced opportunities for integration as well as a focus-group discussion with staff and students	This study highlighted that there has been much concern in the HE sector about the well-being and the safety of international students studying in Australia. The results reported the success of initiatives from the perspective of students as well as key staff and identified further initiatives to support ongoing social integration.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Sidhu and Payne (2019)	Quantitative	Human capital estimates in the UK: 2004 to 2018. UK based Office for National Statistics report.	This study reports that those with a master's degree have an average £65,000 extra in future lifetime earnings – a 10% premium – compared with those with a UG or equivalent degree in 2018. This premium has been consistently evident since 2004. There are now more economically active people in the UK with a master's degree than those without any formal academic qualifications.
Slack et al. (2012)	Mixed	Survey questionnaire and focus group data from prospective and first-year undergraduate students	This research draws on the idea of 'hot' and 'cold' knowledge when considering responses of students to the different information and sources of such information when choosing a university. The findings suggest that many students find 'hot' knowledge, those in their social grapevine, is the most credible. However, this can be complemented by 'warm' knowledge from acquaintances made at university open days. Published university information is often doubted by students however.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Stuart et al. (2008)	Mixed methods	The research explored significant differences between student groups and students' intentions and experience of studying at postgraduate level.	This report analyses the barriers that affect 'widening participation' students when considering study at PGT level. The findings of the report the factors that affect students' decisions to undertake PGT study particularly focusing on whether there was any under-representation of specific groups in PGT study, why students decided to continue to study and what their experience was once they took on PGT study.
Sung and Yang (2009)	Quantitative	A survey was employed to collect data from 336 current UG students at a private university in Seoul.	This South Korean based study considered the key factors affecting students' ongoing support aims toward the university (e.g., giving gifts as alumni, continuing education, and giving referrals regarding the university). The findings propose that in order to cultivate students' supportive behaviour, universities need to establish good relationships obtain a positive reputation through the quality of the learning experience and support ongoing communication with students.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Symons (2001)	Mixed methods	A questionnaire, interviews and focus groups were used to gain a picture of this transition at Glasgow University and similar methods are being conducted at UQ. The	This study outlined that PGT students found the transition to higher degrees can be just as intimidating a transition as the transition from school to university. The main issues faced by students making the transition to a coursework based PGT programme were examined at Glasgow University and compared to issues faced by PGT students at the University of Queensland (UQ). The results found that students face significant problems when beginning a coursework degree and worry about expectations, the 'step-up' in standards and breaks in studying due to time spent working and in moving into a new subject area.
Tobbell, O'Donnell and Zammit (2010)	Qualitative	Ethnographic UK based study using interviews with students, focus groups, email diaries, classroom observations, document analysis and staff interviews.	The study explored university practices and student participation in transition. The main feature of the findings was that multiple identities construct the student experience and contribute to transition.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013)	Qualitative	One-year project funded by the HEA with staff and student participants from 5 UK universities using semi structured interviews, focus groups, diaries, document analysis and observation	This study explored the emerging identities of PGT students as they managed the transition to this level of study. The findings reported specific areas of PGT transition which require greater examination.
Wakeling (2005)	Quantitative	Using Higher Education Statistics Agency data, this paper presents a preliminary investigation of the relationship between social class and progression to postgraduate study in England and considers the interplay with other salient variables, including subject of study, institutional type and first-degree achievement.	This research reports that despite a rapid growth in UK PGT education and a current focus on issues of access to HE, a consideration of possible social class differentials at the PG level is missing from the literature. Evidence of a social class differential in the progression to higher degrees was used to test various sociological theories.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson (2013)	Quantitative	Using data provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency it was possible to identify which kinds of graduates entered higher degrees, in which HEIs, how they funded their studies and how they differ from their how they funded their studies and how they differ from their peers who did not begin a higher degree.	This Higher Education Academy (HEA) report investigated patterns of transition to PGT degrees in first degree graduates who successfully completed their studies in the 2009/10 and 2010/11 academic years, using data about their studies, their background characteristics and their activity after graduation.
Wakeling, Hampden-Thompson and Hancock (2017)	Quantitative	A large-scale survey of 2009 and 2012 graduates from six selective English universities the association between undergraduate debt, other graduate characteristics and progression to postgraduate study was investigated. A multivariate logistic regression model predicted progression to postgraduate study finding that debt is not a statistically significant predictor, although other characteristics are important.	This research reports on the changes to the UG student funding arrangements in England, which provoked concerns that increased student indebtedness would deter them from PGT study. It is clear that student debt has increased substantially in recent years. The results reported some association of higher debt levels with lower rates of progression to PGT study, although this was reduced when controlling for other factors. The study indicated that underlying financial resources, rather than debt per se, were critical in enabling access to PGT study.

Author(s) and Date	Methods	Areas of study	Findings
West (2012)	Qualitative	A two-year formative evaluation was used to elicit students' views on how they experienced the transition to postgraduate study, and to identify what was most and least helpful to students in managing this transition	This study focused on the academic writing aspect of students transition to PGT study in counselling and psychotherapy. The findings from this study showed that the students experienced a significant transition, which a majority found difficult. Timetabled, integrated, subject specific, academic support is recommended to assist students.
Wu (2014)	Mixed	Analysis of the results of a case study performed at three British universities, examining the motivations of mainland Chinese students for choosing courses and study locations in the UK. Data was collected via questionnaires and interviews to compare demographic differences to explore the diversity among this cohort.	This study reported that the mobility of mainland Chinese students across national borders has become common feature globally. This study sought to uncover the underlying factors that motivate these students to pursue PGT study abroad and why these factors are influential.

Appendix 2 - Study participants

Study 1 Participants– Students who recently transitioned to PGT study in 2017

Respondent Initials	O/EU	Gender	Direct/ working	Previous HEI	Current PG programme	UG programme
AM	EU	F	D	X	IB	M
XX	O	F	D	X	EIB	AFM
YP	O	F	D	O	IB	AC
RA	O	F	W	X	SMM	PIR
YU	O	F	D	UK	SMM	IB
CA	EU	F	D	EU	SIB	BA
HI	EU	F	D	EU	BAM	FST
JU	EU	F	W	EU	SIB	BAM
MI	O	F	D	UK	SMM	HBM
NA	EU	F	W	EU	SIB	BAT
CH	EU	F	W	EU	SMM	HAE
ET	O	M	D	O	IB	ME
LI	LH	M	D	UK	BAM	BM
MG	H	M	D	X	SIB	IBAM
SO	H	M	D	UK	IB	MS
UZ	H	M	D	UK	IB	CS
VI	EU	M	W	EU	SIB	GM

Key:

O = Overseas, EU = European, H = Home, LH = Local Home

D= Direct entrant from UG programme, W = Working prior to joining PG Programme

Previous HEI; X= The study university, UK= Other UK HEI, O= Overseas HEI

Current PGT = Current PG programme being studied: IB= International Business, SIB= Strategy & International Business, SMM= Strategic Marketing Management, BAM= Business & Management, EIB= Entrepreneurship & International Business.

UG = Undergraduate programme previously studied: M = Marketing, AFM= Accounting for Management, AC= Accounting; PIR= Politics and International Relations, IB= International Business, BA= Business Administration, FST= Food Science & Technology, BAM = Business & Management, HBM = Hospitality & Business Management, BAT = Business & Technology, HE = History & Ethnography, ME = Mechatronic Engineering, BM = Business Management, IBAM = International Business & Management, MS = Medical Science, CS = Computer Science, GE = General Management

Study 2 Participants– UG Students considering transitioning to PGT study in 2017

Respondent Initials	O/EU	Gender	Direct/ working	Chosen HEI	PG programme	Current UG programme
DA	H	M	D	UOB	ES	BAM
AS	O	M	D	HK	ACC	BAM
ES	EU	F	D	HW	LAT	IBAM
GS	H	F	D	IC	BS	BAM
JW	O	M	D	UOB	M	M
CP	O	M	D	X	SMM	IBAM
US	LH	F	D	BCU	PGC	BAM
CH	EU	F	D	X	SMM	AFM
KA	EU	F	D	X	IB	M
KE	O	M	D	X	SMM	PAB
LI	O	F	D	X	SMM	BAS
SU	LH	M	D	X	SIB	EC
CZ	O	M	D	X	AAF	BAM

Key:

O = Overseas, EU = European, H = Home, LH = Local Home

D= Direct entrant from UG programme or W = Working prior to joining PG programme

Chosen HEI; X= The study university, UoB= University of Birmingham, BCU = Birmingham City University, IC = Imperial College, HW = Herriot Watt University, HK = Hong Kong University

Chosen PGT programme; ES= Environmental Science, ACC= Accounting, LAT = Languages & Translation, M= Marketing, PGC = Teaching, SMM= Strategic Marketing Management, IB =

International Business, SIB= Strategy and International Business, BAM = Business and Management, AAF= Accounting and Finance.

UG programme currently studied BAM = BSc Business and Management, BSc IBAM= International Business and Management, M= BSc Marketing, AFM = BSc Accounting for Management, PAB = BSc Psychology and Business, BAS = BSc Business and Sociology, EC= BSc Economics

Study 3 Participants– Students who recently transitioned to PGT study in 2018

Respondent Initials	O/EU	Gender	Direct/ working	Previous HEI	Current PG programme	UG programme
LT	O	F	D	O	SMM	FAB
RL	O	M	D	O	BAM	BM
RU	LH	M	D	X	IB	M
ST	H	F	D	UK	SMM	PAE
LJ	O	F	W	UK	BAM	BA
ML	EU	M	D	EU	SMM	EC
XB	O	F	D	O	SMM	EE
ZY	O	M	D	O	SIB	BAH
TL	O	M	D	O	SMM	BAE
MF	EU	F	W	EU	SMM	EPS
MG	EU	F	W	EU	SMM	FL
GS	EU	M	D	EU	SIB	TM
AV	EU	F	D	EU	SMM	EAF
JL	LH	M	D	X	SIB	BAM

Key:

O = Overseas, EU = European, H = Home, LH = Local home

D= Direct entrant from UG programme, W = Working prior to joining PG Programme

Previous HEI; X= The study university, UK= Other UK HEI, O= Overseas HEI

Current PGT = Current PG programme being studied: IB= International Business, SIB= Strategy & International Business, SMM= Strategic Marketing Management.

UG = Undergraduate programme previously studied FAB= Finance & Banking, BM= Business Management, M= Marketing, PAE= Philosophy & English, BA= Business Administration, EC= Economics, EE= Environmental Engineering, BAH, Broadcasting & Hosting, BAE= Business & English, EPS= Economics & Political Science, FL=Foreign Languages, TM= Tourism Management, EAF= English & French, BAM= Business & Management.

Appendix 3 - Interview Topic Guide 1 (used for study 1 and study 2)

Interview Topic Guide: Question areas	Academic sources
Student motivations to join a PGT Programme (Phase 1) Probe: Self-development, personal/own interest, job prospects, preparing for a career in certain fields, academic reasons, change in subject area, conversion to another subject area, other reasons/motives/aspirations.	Donaldson and McNicholas, 2004; Harvey et al., 2004; Pires, 2009; Lui, 2010; Morgan, 2013; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014; Neves and Lehman, 2019, Biggs, 1996; Prosser and Trigwell, 1999; Symons, 2001; Cluett and Skene, 2006; O' Donnell et al., 2009; West, 2012; Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013.
Choice of university Probe: reputation /university branding/ image/rankings/ accreditation WOM recommendations/ parents, tutor or peer advice/prior experience of university/work experience Communications/ information received/open days Building trust/confidence benefits through HEI reputation and image?	Hesketh and Knight, 1999; Baden-Fuller et al., 2000; Tight, 2000; Schultz et al., 2001; Donaldson and McNicholas, 2004; Smith, 2006; Morgan, 2013; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014; Neves and Lehman, 2019, de Chernatony, 2001; Alessandri et al., 2006; Blanton, 2007; Chapleo, 2008; Waeras & Solbakk, 2009, Owens and Loomes, 2010; Palmer and Koenig-Lewis, 2011; Coneyworth et al., 2019, Mattson and Barnes, 2009; Johnston, 2010; Slack et al., 2012; Dietrich and SalmaAro, 2013; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014, Griffith and Rothstein, 2009;

Interview Topic Guide: Question areas	Academic sources
Choice of PGT programme Probe: how are you financing PGT studies/ costs /loans /fees/scholarships? Special treatment benefits?	Donaldson and McNicholas, 2012; Lindley and Machin, 2013; Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson, 2014; Wu, 2014; Morgan, 2014; Mateos-Gonzalez and Wakeling, 2020; Hennig Thurau et al., 2002; Moorman et al., 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Casidy, 2014; Lang & Lawson, 2013; Carter, 2009.
Initial expectations /(or) experiences with PGT (Phase 2.1) Prob: Feelings/Levels of preparedness: what are their academic expectations/challenges/ programme experiences/ academic engagement and commitment, skills and knowledge development /expected participation /pedagogy/expected relationship with learning/student autonomy & direction/ value of PGT/ differentiation from UG graduates/future employability Perceived value/service quality/satisfaction?	Jackson et al., 2000; Bennett and Kottasz,2006; O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007; Krause and Coates, 2008; Drennan and Clarke 2009; Heussi, 2012; Coneyworth et al., 2019; Lobo and Gurney, 2014; Morgan & Direito, 2016; Smith, 2016; Bamber et al., 2017; Gbadamosi, 2018; Symons, 2001; Mather, 2007; Burch, 2008; Seah, 2008; Winter and Dinsmore, 2010; Owens and Loomes, 2010; Tobbell et al.,2010; Heussi, 2012; Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013; Bamber et al., 2017; Brown, 2007; Melles, 2009; O'Donnell et al. 2009; Masterman and Shuyska, 2012; Heussi, 2013; Kember et al., 2014, Hesketh and Knight, 1999; Watkins and Biggs, 2001; Garrison and Kanuka, 2004; Hounsell et al., 2005; Littlejohn and Pegler, 2007; Browne and Garrison, 2007; Kingston and Forland, 2008; 2013; Coates and Dickenson, 2012; Masterman and Shuyska, 2012; Bamber et al., 2017; Parasuraman et al., 1998; Rowley, 1997; Hill, 1995; Elliot & Shin, 2002, Bejou, 2005; Al-Alak, 2006; Voss, 2009; Li, 2014; Helgesen 2008; Kotler; 2003; Teeroovengadum et al., 2019; Grönroos, 2011; Berry et al., 1990; Donaldson & McNicholas, 2004; Hennig-Thurau et al, 2002.

Interview Topic Guide: Question areas	Academic sources
Relationships and networking (phase 2.2) Probe: Activities/events importance of social interaction and relationships – with other students and tutors/ learning community engagement/cultural awareness and language Social benefits? Probe: Building social capital –how & what assists this /sense of belonging/ becoming a PG student - connectedness to the university /feeling accepted/ respected/ included and supported by others/ Building trust and rapport and relationship quality	Perry and Allard, 2003; Johnson and Watson, 2004; Tobbell et al., 2010; Wood & Waite, 2011; Falloon, 2011; Briggs at al. 2012; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013; Menzies and Baron, 2014; Matheson and Sutcliffe, 2018; Wenger, 1998; Margolis, 2005; O'Neil et al., 2007; Cowan, 2015; Matheson and Sutcliffe, 2018; House, 1981; Shapiro and Levine, 1999; Lacina, 2002; Menzies and Baron, 2014; Byrne and Flood, 2005; Lui, 2009; Edwards and Li, 2011; Egege and Kutieleh, 2013; Wu, 2014. Clarke et al., 2017; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002; Morgan & Hunt, 1994
Identity Construction and Change (phase 2.3) Probe: Social or personal changes expected to be likely or to emerge/expectations of perceived change to identity/personal growth /identity salience. Professional identity creation (preparation & orientation for working life). Self-image development/ growing confidence and self-esteem.	Gallacher et al., 2002; Tam, 2002; Huon and Sankey, 2002; Tranter, 2003; Johnson and Watson, 2004; Kember and Leung, 2005; Scanlon et al., 2005; Adams et al., 2006; Good and Adams, 2008; Christie et al., 2008; Briggs et al., 2012; Lairio et al., 2013; Arnett et al., 2003; Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 1986; Hogg et al., 1995; Stryker, 1968, 1980, 1987; Callero,1985; Thoits, 1991; Gallacher et al., 2002; Arnett et al, 2003; Archer, 2008; Lairio, 2013.

Interview Topic Guide: Question areas	Academic sources
Programme & other support available (phase 2.4) Probe: programme organisation & office support/library/ learning centre/careers support/ IT support /mentors/ tutor support /other support and encouragement available Learner satisfaction and commitment through service quality?	Smith, 2006; Tobbell et al., 2010; Coates and Dickenson, 2012; West, 2012; Heussi, 2013; Bamber et al, 2017; Coneyworth et al., 2019; Moorman at al., 1994; Geyskens et al., 1996; Söllner, 1994; Pritchard et al., 1999; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002.
Post PGT activity (phase 3) Alumni services/becoming an alumnus/alumna/networking Loyalty/WOM recommendations	Artess et al., 2014; Helgesen & Nesset, 2007; Suer & O'Donnell, 2006; Ravald & Grönroos, 1996; Oliver 1997; Lam et al, 2004.

Appendix 4 - Interview Topic Guide 2 (used for study 3)

Includes additional questions

Interview Topic Guide: Question areas	Academic sources
Student motivations to join a PGT Programme (Phase 1) Probe: Self-development, personal/own interest, job prospects, preparing for a career in certain fields, academic reasons, change in subject area, conversion to another subject area, other reasons/motives/aspirations.	Donaldson and McNicholas, 2004; Harvey et al., 2004; Pires, 2009; Lui, 2010; Morgan, 2013; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014; Neves and Lehman, 2019, Biggs, 1996; Prosser and Trigwell, 1999; Symons, 2001; Cluett and Skene, 2006; O' Donnell et al., 2009; West, 2012; Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013.

Interview Topic Guide: Question areas	Academic sources
Choice of university Probe: reputation for research/reputation for excellence in Learning & Teaching/TEF /REF/ university branding/ image/ranking/ accreditation Trust and confidence in the university WOM recommendation/ parents, tutor or peer advice/prior experience of university/work experience Communications/ information received/open days **Choice of PGT programme** Probe: how are you financing PGT studies/ costs /loans /fees/scholarships and discounts (special treatment benefits) Location of the HEI/city location/ease of access/safety issues	Hesketh and Knight, 1999; Baden-Fuller et al., 2000; Tight, 2000; Schultz et al., 2001; Donaldson and McNicholas, 2004; Smith, 2006; Morgan, 2013; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014; Neves and Lehman, 2019, de Chernatony, 2001; Alessandri et al., 2006; Blanton, 2007; Chapleo, 2008; Waeras & Solbakk, 2009, Owens and Loomes, 2010; Palmer and Koenig-Lewis, 2011; Coneyworth et al., 2019, Mattson and Barnes, 2009; Johnston, 2010; Slack et al., 2012; Dietrich and SalmaAro, 2013; Mellors-Bourne et al., 2014, Griffith and Rothstein, 2009; Donaldson and McNicholas, 2012; Lindley and Machin, 2013; Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson, 2014; Wu, 2014; Morgan, 2014; Mateos-Gonzalez and Wakeling, 2020 Mateos-Gonzalez and Wakeling, 2020; Hennig Thurau et al., 2002; Moorman et al., 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Casidy, 2014; Lang & Lawson, 2013; Carter, 2009.

Interview Topic Guide: Question areas	Academic sources
Initial expectations /experiences/value of PGT (Phase 2.1) Prob: Feelings/Levels of preparedness: academic expectations/challenges/ programme experiences/ academic engagement and commitment, skills and knowledge development /expected participation /pedagogy/expected relationship with learning/student autonomy & direction/ perceived value of PGT/ differentiation from UG graduates/future employability/ Levels of satisfaction/service quality issues Assessment: types/group work issues/feedback: timescales & methods/contact hours	Jackson et al., 2000; Bennett and Kottasz,2006; O'Donnell and Tobbell, 2007; Krause and Coates, 2008; Drennan and Clarke 2009; Heussi, 2012; Coneyworth et al., 2019; Lobo and Gurney, 2014; Morgan & Direito, 2016; Smith, 2016; Bamber et al., 2017; Gbadamosi, 2018; Symons, 2001; Mather, 2007; Burch, 2008; Seah, 2008; Winter and Dinsmore, 2010; Owens and Loomes, 2010, Tobbell et al., 2010; Heussi. 2012, Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013, Bamber et al., 2017; Brown, 2007; Melles, 2009; O'Donnell et al. 2009; Masterman and Shuyska, 2012; Heussi, 2013; Kember et al., 2014, Coneyworth et al. 2019, Hesketh and Knight, 1999; Watkins and Biggs, 2001; Garrison and Kanuka, 2004; Parkes and Raymond, 2004; Ramsey and Mason, 2004; Holmes, 2005; Hounsell et al., 2005; Littlejohn and Pegler, 2007; Browne and Garrison, 2007; Gabriel and Griffiths, 2008; Kingston and Forland, 2008; O'Donnell et al, 2009; 2013; Tobbell et al, 2010; Coates and Dickenson, 2012; Masterman and Shuyska, 2012; West; 2012; Heussi, 2013; Bamber et al., 2017; Coneyworth et al., 2019. Parasuraman et al., 1998; Rowley, 1997; Hill, 1995; Elliot & Shin, 2002, Bejou, 2005; Al-Alak, 2006; Voss, 2009; Li, 2014; Helgesen 2008; Kotler; 2003; Teeroovengadum et al., 2019; Grönroos, 2011; Berry et al., 1990; Donaldson & McNicholas, 2004; Hennig-Thurau et al, 2002

Interview Topic Guide: Question areas	Academic sources
Relationships and networking (Phase 2.2) Probe: Activities/events and induction /Importance of social interaction and socialisation – with other students and tutors/ learning community engagement Probe: Building social capital –how & what assists this /sense of belonging/ sense of becoming a PG student - connectedness to the university /feeling accepted/ respected/ included and supported by others/trust and rapport/making friends/cultural issues/language issues/social benefits	Perry and Allard, 2003; Johnson and Watson, 2004; Tobbell et al., 2010; Wood & Waite, 2011; Falloon, 2011; Briggs at al. 2012; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013; Menzies and Baron, 2014; Matheson and Sutcliffe, 2018; Wenger, 1998; Margolis, 2005; O'Neil et al., 2007; Cowan, 2015; Matheson and Sutcliffe, 2018; House, 1981; Shapiro and Levine, 1999; Lacina, 2002; Menzies and Baron, 2014; Byrne and Flood, 2005; Lui, 2009; Edwards and Li, 2011; Egege and Kutieleh, 2013; Wu, 2014; Clarke et al., 2017; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002; Morgan & Hunt, 1994
Identity Construction and Change (Phase 2.3) Probe: Social or personal changes expected to be likely or to emerge/expectations of perceived change to identity/personal growth Professional identity creation (preparation & orientation for working life). Self-image development/ growing confidence and self-esteem.	Gallacher et al., 2002; Tam, 2002; Huon and Sankey, 2002; Tranter, 2003; Johnson and Watson, 2004; Kember and Leung, 2005; Scanlon et al., 2005; Adams et al., 2006; Good and Adams, 2008; Christie et al., 2008; Briggs et al., 2012; Lairio et al., 2013; Arnett et al., 2003; Tajfel and Turner, 1979, 1986; Hogg et al., 1995; Stryker, 1968, 1980, 1987; Callero, 1985; Thoits, 1991; Gallacher et al., 2002; Arnett et al, 2003; Archer, 2008; Lairio, 2013.

Interview Topic Guide: Question areas	Academic sources
Programme & other support available (Phase 2.4) Probe: programme organisation/ dedicated PGT office support/library/ learning centre/careers support/ IT support /mentors/ tutor support / support and encouragement for overseas students PGT learning environment / social spaces/ common rooms/ access to IT and other facilities Learner satisfaction/commitment	Litten and Hall, 1989, Hesketh and Knight, 1999; Humphrey and McCarthy, 1999; Harvey, 2000; Bowman, 2005; Sapri et al. 2009; Smith, 2006; Tobbell et al., 2010; Coates and Dickenson, 2012; Tomlinson, 2012; West, 2012; Heussi, 2013; Holes, 2013; Artess et al., 2014; Bamber et al, 2017; Clarke, 2017; Coneyworth et al., 2019, Neves and Lehman, 2019; Moorman at al., 1994; Geyskens et al., 1996; Söllner, 1994; Pritchard et al., 1999; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002.
Post PGT activity (Phase 3) Alumni services/becoming an alumnus/alumna/networking/ post PGT careers support/other post PGT experiences Loyalty/WOM recommendations	Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001; Sung and Yang, 2009; Farrow and Yuan, 2011; Artess et al., 2014; Koening- Lewis et al., 2016 Helgesen & Nesset, 2007; Suer & O'Donnell, 2006; Ravald & Grönroos, 1996; Oliver 1997; Lam et al, 2004.

Appendix 5 - Example of the sign-up sheet handed out in PG and UG classes for students to complete

Sign-up sheet for PGT transition study

I am willing to be interviewed as part of a research study into students' expectations and experiences of transition to postgraduate study

Name: Email address:

Appendix 6 - Email sent to those current PGT/UG students who added their details to the sign -up sheet, asking them to participate in the study

Dear (Student name),

I am contacting you because I am conducting qualitative research, using personal interviews, into the attitudes and expectations of students about their transition to postgraduate studies. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. I am interested to find out directly, from postgraduate (or undergraduate) students themselves, about how and why students decide to undertake postgraduate level studies and what changes and developments they experience during this important period of their education. This research is being conducted as part of my PhD studies.

Your assistance with this study will be very much appreciated, as it will help inform me about current students' opinions, which are very important. Your feedback from the interview will be completely anonymous, your name will not appear and not be reported in the completed study. You may withdraw from the interview at any time, and you will suffer no penalty should you choose to withdraw. That is, your student experience at Aston (and marks), are not affected by your decision to participate in this research project in any way.

The interview is expected to last for no longer than 60 minutes in total. If you agree to participate please could you kindly inform me via email.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to either email me at w.tabrizi@aston.ac.uk or telephone my office on: 0121 204 3794. Please leave me a message if I am not there.

Many thanks for your support and participation!

Best wishes,

Wendy Tabrizi

Room 419, Marketing & Strategy Group

Aston Business School

<div align="center">

THANK YOU!

</div>

This project has been ethically approved by Aston University:

Appendix 7 - Consent form given to those students who agreed to participate at the interview

CONSENT FORM

I confirm that I am happy to participate in the qualitative study being conducted by Wendy Tabrizi into students' expectations and experiences when transitioning to postgraduate study at university. I understand that any feedback I provide will be completely anonymized and confidentially reported.

I fully consent to participate in an interview study as part of this study as outlined above

Name: _____ Student No: _____

Programme: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

This project has been ethically approved by Aston University:

(please see application form appended)

Appendix 8 - Form filled out by the interviewer with student respondents present to obtain their personal details at interview

Hi

I hope that you will help me with my PhD research into students transitioning into postgraduate study by participating in a short interview with me please.

The interview will take approximately 60 minutes in total and any responses that you provide to my questions will remain completely confidential and will not be disclosed to a third party, they will be completely anonymised at the analysis stage.

Many thanks,

Wendy Tabrizi

Personal Information about the interviewee:

Name: Home Postcode (if UK):

Aston Student Number: DOB:

Gender: M/F   Where domiciled – Local/UK/EU/Overseas

Where UG studies were completed:

Which first degree programme undertaken and when:

Which PGT programme chosen & when commenced:

Working prior to commencement of PGT studies – where and when:

Appendix 9 - Example of an interview transcript with student UZ (study 1)

I: Where did you complete your undergraduate studies?

M: So, I completed my undergraduate studies at B University.

I: At B. And what did you study?

M: Yeah, I studied Computer Science for three years.

I: Computer Science, okay. And which programme are you on now?

M: Now I'm on the International Business MSc programme.

I: You're on IB, thank you very much. Do you mind if I ask you, have any of your close family been to university? has your mum or dad or any siblings?

M: So, my mum and dad have not been to university, no.

I: Okay.

M: I'm the eldest sibling, so I was the first one to go to university.

I: Yeah.

M: And now my younger brother, he's 20, 19 or 20 and he goes to university but my dad's younger brother he's been to university.

I: Okay. So, your uncle's been to university as well?

M: My uncle's been to university and one of my aunties has been to university as well.

I: Okay, that's very helpful, thank you very much. And do you mind if I ask you what your dad does for a living?

M: Yeah, he works at Land Rover.

I: Oh, he works at Land Rover, Okay, that's great, thank you for that.

M: Yeah, that's fine.

I: I'm going to ask you now about your postgraduate programme, about the International Business programme and about how you felt about joining it. Can I ask you what was your main reason for wanting to do the programme? What was it that made you want to do it?

M: So, once I'd completed my undergraduate course at B, I decided that I wanted to take a gap year just to travel.

I: Yes.

M: And so, I decided to go to China because I was presented with the opportunity to teach English and get paid as well, while I was travelling.

I: Interesting.

M: Yeah, so last year basically I lived in China for about nine months.

I: Okay.

M: Teaching English at a middle school. And I was lucky enough to experience the new culture and the lifestyle and I also got to travel to other countries in East Asia, like Japan, Thailand and Malaysia.

I: OK.

M: But I really enjoyed the experience in China and because I was living there for a while you know; I was networking and I made some good connections and saw some good opportunities for some business ideas and that sort of motivated me to come back. I already knew that I wanted to come back and do a master's but I wasn't too sure which one.

I: Yes.

M: And that motivated me and inspired me into doing International Business.

I: So, it was because of your travelling and your experience of working abroad?

M: Yes, because you know, I as well plan to go back.

I: Yes.

M: I thought that would be the right choice.

I: Yes,. So, was that mostly thinking about your future employment? Was that your main goal?

M: Yes, future employment and I thought it would be … because I was interested in business, more so than the computing side of things, even though I studied Computer Science.

I: Yes.

M: I preferred the business side of it. So, I thought it would be good if I actually got the knowledge and deeper insight.

I: Okay. So, you were at B but what was it about X's programme that attracted you?

M: Well I did some research and I found out that X had one of the best business schools in the UK. And then I wanted a change as well, I didn't want to go back to B, even though I had the opportunity to go back. But, I applied to X for undergrad as well, I always wanted to go to there but at that time I didn't have like the grades to get in, so I got rejected. But I was lucky enough to get in for the MSc.

I: Yes. So, what type of information helped you find out about X?

M: I have friends who'd been going to X and then they recommended it to me and I done some research online.

I: Yes.

M: And like my uncle and auntie who've been to university, they spoke to me about it and recommended me to go to X.

I: OK. So, are you self-financing at the moment then your postgraduate study?

M: Yeah, I was offered a scholarship which I haven't received yet, I need to chase that up. This was something that helped me decide.

I: Yes.

M: And I've taken out a student loan.

I: Okay, So do you think we do enough to sort of inform students about what is offered at X or is there anything else that you think could have helped?

M: I think all the information that's available online is quite sufficient to be honest, it does a good job.

I: Okay, thank you.

M: Okay yes,

I: Can I ask you about when you joined the programme because you've obviously been with us for a few weeks now.

M: Yeah.

I: How did you feel about it when you joined? How were you feeling about it?

M: When I joined I was a little bit … I was optimistic but I was a little bit nervous because I've never studied business before.

I: Yes.

M: But the lecturers kind of make you feel at ease when you start. They tell you that everyone's going to start at the same level and they go through it with you and they tell you that you know, there's a lot of people who've never studied it before.

I: Yes.

M: So, I was feeling … like after a bit I felt more confident, after about the first week I'd say.

I: Yes. So, did you feel well-prepared do you think?

M: Yes, I think I was well-prepared. I think the gap year done me some good and I gained some good experience. And it was good for my confidence as well I think.

I: Yes.

M: I think you need a lot of confidence in the MSc programme because you have to do like a lot of presentations and things as well which I wasn't really used to in undergraduate.

I: Yes of course.

M: But like I said when I was in China I was doing like assemblies in front of a school and everything, so I have gained confidence as well.

I: What about the kind of learning you are experiencing? As autonomous learner, how do you feel about that?

M: I think you have to adapt as soon as you start. I think you have to have good time management skills first of all and if you do it definitely helps because it's really intense compared to an undergraduate course where … there's not too much time in between assignments and exams. So, it really helps to be prepared when you come in with the time management skills. But even if you don't, you kind of automatically have to adjust and you have to adapt basically, otherwise it's going to be tough. And I think I did a good job in that. And I think the course really helps you to improve your time management skills.

I: Yes. So, in terms of looking back now on the first few weeks, has the programme met your expectations? Is it you expected to find or is it different?

M: I think for the most part, yeah it was exactly what I expected. Yeah, I'd say it was exactly like how I expected, the intensity and the amount of work that you get, the workload is quite a lot but it's to be expected with an MSc to be honest.

I: As expected?

M: I didn't expect to get like an exam so soon. I think I had an exam in like week four or five, I had an exam. It was surprising to have that.

I: Right.

M: But like I said that's all part and parcel of the MSc programme, you have to adapt and then it shows you know, your time management skills, etc.

I: So, do you feel like now you've been here for a few weeks, do you feel like you've developed relationship with the University?

M: Yeah, I feel like I'm settling down well now and I have a better relationship I think with this university in terms of you know, networking with my colleagues and the lecturers a lot better than when I was at B.

I: OK.

M: I feel like it's more of like I feel part of something you know, like a community.

I: You part of a community?

M: Yeah. We kind of work together and support each other with learning.

I: So, are you satisfied with your choice?

M: Yeah, I'm very satisfied. I think especially when we try and get in contact with lecturers via email and things, they are quite quick to reply and they're very helpful. The tutors are very good, they know their subject and support us well.

I: OK.

M: You know, it's a big change from when I was at B because they were not really efficient in that way. For example, when I was doing my dissertation I emailed my supervisor and he didn't get back to me until after the deadline had passed. It made me very dissatisfied.

I: I see.

M: But at X I think they do a much better job. More efficient, more helpful.

I: Okay, so in terms of your learning and your skills development what are you hoping to really build on and develop while you're here?

M: While I'm here at X I'm hoping to improve my presentation skills, my confidence, I'm hoping to get a better background knowledge of international business. And hoping to network and you know make new friends from different cultures and different backgrounds.

I: Yeah.

M: And hopefully just work and improve on my skills that I already have and hopefully acquire some new skills.

I: So, you said there were differences between your experience here and at B. Tell me more about that please?

M: I'd say it's slightly less formal teaching style over here. Its more friendly and supportive. You are expected to do a lot of learning by yourself but it suits me.

I: Yes.

M: And actually, like for me anyway I feel like that's better, it makes you feel as though you have a better connection with your lecturers and it makes you feel like you can go and talk to them like when you need. And yeah, basically I feel like that we do have better autonomy as students here.

I: What about support from various areas, from your lecturers and from the Programme Office, the library?

M: Yeah, to be honest I haven't had any problems this year when I needed to talk with someone or find out about something, it's always clear where I need to go. And if I'm not sure I just send an email and someone gets back to me. So yeah, we are well supported.

I: In terms of the social aspects, what is the social interaction like on your programme?

M: Yeah it's great, I mean we've had like … just recently we had a dinner, we had a dinner for our IB course and that was great. And we've had like a few weeks before we had like a social gathering where you can connect with other students and even some of the lecturers. And this gives you like a better sort of community, so when you're in the lectures like everybody is talking to each other and no-one is like by themselves and everyone is quiet like sometimes you have on an undergrad course. And on this course it's quite … I don't know what's the word I'm looking for … everyone basically talks to each other and integrates with each other.

I: You have all got to know each other?

M: Yeah basically, yeah.

I: Tell me about the ways you think you are growing and developing as a professional person?

M: Yeah, like I think one of the main things it helps you with is confidence and you know because me, generally I'm like naturally like a shy person.

I: Yes.

M: But you have to, like always be connecting with different people and socialising and integrating, it kind of builds that confidence in you.

I: Yes.

M: And also, when I gave to give presentations, formal presentations, I think it helps with your professionalism.

I: Yes.

M: It helps to be more professional and more like how you would be in a working environment, I think that's really good.

I: So, do you feel it is helping to build your self-esteem and your confidence in the main?

M: Yeah.

I: Is there anything that X could do further to help support you in developing as a professional businessperson?

M: To be honest I can't really think of anything to be honest. There's a lot of … I feel there's a lot of like what's the word, events that go on you know, companies come in and past students, and I think there's a lot of events going on that help with that.

I: Is that part of the programme?

M: Yes. The PDP process really helps a lot. And it helps with interviews and internships and like I also have applied for an internship recently and I emailed my PDP and they helped me out with the process, which was quite helpful. So yeah, that was quite helpful.

I: Thank you very much for your time today, that's been really helpful.

M: Okay, thank you.

I: And I hope you're feeling better soon.

M: Yeah, hope so, thank you.

I: Okay, thank you, bye.

M: Thanks, bye-bye.

END OF RECORDING

Appendix 10 - Research Ethics Approval Form

Appendix 10 – Example of Ethical approval form for Phase 1 of the study commencing October 2017

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Research Ethics Application

Once you have completed this form and obtained the appropriate signatories, please return it to the ABS Research Ethics Committee Secretary Rochelle Hancock (r.hancock@aston.ac.uk) with all accompanying documents.

Section 1 - Project details

Project title:	Students' effective transition to postgraduate study
SREC number (Office use only):	

Section 2 - Applicant details

Name of researcher (applicant):	Wendy Tabrizi		
Status (UG student / PG student / Staff):	PhD student (and staff member)	Email address:	w.tabrizi@aston.ac.uk
Contact address:	Room 419 ABS Aston University		
Contact telephone:	0121 204 3794		

Section 3a – For Students only

Student ID Number:			
Course:	PhD Management	Module name and Number:	N/A
Supervisor / Module Leader name(s):	Professor Helen Higson and Dr Anna Ackfeldt		

Section 3b – For Supervisors only

Please agree with the following statements by placing an X in the appropriate boxes (if completing electronically, double click on the box and select 'checked').

The student has read the Research Ethics guidelines and the University's Research Governance document	☒
The topic merits further research	☒
The student has the skills to carry out the research	☒
The participant information sheet or leaflet is appropriate	☐
The procedures for recruitment and obtaining informed consent are appropriate	☐

This research does not involve anything sensitive or involve vulnerable people. I am satisfied that the participants will be well informed and will get feedback on their input. The methodology has been passed by the QR examiners.

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	Comments from
Supervisor: Professor Helen Higson	

Section 4 – Summary of research (no more than 300 words)

The transitions that students make to university have received considerable attention by researchers over recent years. Educational transition can be defined as the move from one educational environment to another. In these transitions, the actual educational institutions might not change, but the type and mode of study students participate in might well undergo significant changes. To date there has been only limited research exploring the transition that students make to postgraduate taught (PGT) study. The primary aim of this PhD study is to address this research gap by identifying the issues faced by Business students in making their transition to PGT study and how this change can be successfully managed by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) through the application of relationship marketing (RM) strategies. In order to achieve this aim, the following research objectives have been formulated:

- To examine the ways in which transitioning PGT students' motivations and choices of university and programme can be influenced by RM factors

- To ascertain how PGT students' expectations, experiences and self - identities are influenced during transition and whether RM factors can help

- To determine the extent to which programme organisation and other activities support transitioning PGT students towards successful outcomes and a long-term relationship with the HEI.

In order that the overall aims and objectives of this exploratory study are achieved, the research will commence in phase 1 with the collection of qualitative data via semi structured interviews. There will be 2 pilot studies undertaken initially prior to the main qualitative data collection, with student participants coming from both undergraduate postgraduate Business programmes at Aston University.

Section 5 – Research protocols (no more than 300 words)

A modified grounded theory strategy will be adopted employing an exploratory sequential research design. The first main phase of the study will commence with the collection of qualitative data via semi structured interviews in October 2017 with completion anticipated to be in November 2017. 2 pilot studies will be carried out initially to test robustness of the topic guide in preparation for the main data collection in phase 1. Ethical approval is sought at this stage for phase 1 only.

The participants will consist of both undergraduate and postgraduate students currently undertaking Business programmes at Aston University. Using a semi structured interview approach, the researcher will be able to explore in depth, the insights, attitudes, expectations and opinions of undergraduate students about their personal perceptions of postgraduate study together with their intentions as to whether they feel transition to postgraduate study is something they wish to pursue either straight after graduation or sometime in the future.

Both UG and PG students will be recruited via email using a purposive (theoretical sampling) approach. Student participants will be segmented per their gender and their domicile, i.e. Local home, Home, Overseas or EU.

5 students from both UG (final year) and PG cohorts will be recruited to participate in the pilot studies. Given the modified grounded theory approach to be adopted, the researcher will continue to collect data until the point of theoretical saturation. The sample size is unlikely to exceed 50 participants. Participants used in the 2 initial pilot studies will not be the same as those recruited for the main phase of data collection, nor for the second phase of the study which will include PGT students commencing their studies in 2018 and will be conducted later in the academic year . Ethical approval for phase 2 will be sought at a later date in 2017.

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Explain when, how, where, and to whom the results will be disseminated, including whether participants will be provided with any information on the findings or outcomes of the project.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

As data collection involves students of Aston Business School, appropriate measures will be employed to ensure anonymity of respondents, as well as clear communication that participation in this study is entirely voluntary, participants can withdraw from the study at any time, with no adverse consequences.

DATA PROTECTION:

All data will be stored on a secure computer and will only be available to the researcher. In keeping with standard practice of top marketing journals, data will be kept for 5 years from the conclusion of the study in case it is requested by colleagues, reviewers and/or meta-analysts.

DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS:

It is expected that results will be disseminated both internally (for PhD study purposes), and externally (e.g. conference presentations, journal articles). Information on participants will always be presented in an anonymised fashion. Depending on the nature of the information being presented, the name of Aston University may also be made confidential, with a descriptor term being used instead (e.g. "participants came from a mid-sized UK University").

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Participant selection

1.	Does the research involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent? (e.g. children, those with cognitive impairment or those in unequal relationships, e.g. your own students). If yes, provide detail and copies of consent forms to be included.	Yes ☐	No ☒
2.	Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited? (e.g. students at school, members of a self-help group, residents of a nursing home). If yes, copies of letters of approval to be included.	Yes ☐	No ☒
3.	Will the study involve research of pregnant women / women in labour?	Yes ☐	No ☒
4.	Will the study involve children/legal minors (anyone under the age of 16 years)?	Yes ☐	No ☒
5.	Will the study involve adults (over the age of 16 years and competent to give consent)?	Yes ☒	No ☐
6.	Will the study involve research on vulnerable categories of people who may include minority groups?	Yes ☒	No ☐
7.	Will the study in research of participants for whom English in not their first language?	Yes ☒	No ☐
8.	Does the research involve investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	Yes ☐	No ☒
9.	Does the study involve participants aged 16 years or over who are unable to give informed consent? (e.g people with learning disabilities; see Mental Capacity Act 2005) **All research that falls under the auspices of the MCA must be reviewed by NHS NRES (see Qn. 51)**	Yes ☐	No ☒

10. Number of participants: Until theoretical saturation – no more than 50

11. Over what time span will participants be used? 1 year – until December 2017

12. Criteria for selection of participants: Current UG or PG Business students

13. Source of participants: Aston University

14.	Are the participants patients? If yes, state diagnosis and clinic/responsible practitioner:	Yes ☐	No ☒
15.	Does the study have any specific exclusion criteria for participants? If yes, on what grounds? If not sure, explain why not:	Yes ☐	No ☒
16.	Is the activity of the participant to be restricted in any way either before or after the procedure? (eg. diet, driving). If yes, please specify duration and type(s) of restriction	Yes ☐	No ☒
17.	Will payments be made to the participants? (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) If yes, provide details of how much, for what purpose and how it will be paid:	Yes ☐	No ☒

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Risk Management - Consent		
18. Does the research involve members of the public in a research capacity (participant capacity)?	Yes ☐	No ☒
a. Will it be necessary for participants / participating organisations and companies to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time? (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)	Yes ☐	No ☒
b. Are the participants fully informed about the procedures to be used and the purpose of the research? If yes, provide copies of participant briefing documents- Please see accompanying documentation	Yes ☒	No ☐
c. Will the consent of the participants / participating organisations and companies be obtained? If yes, provide copies of consent forms. If no, explain why it is not possible to gain the participant's consent and the justification for undertaking the research without it: Yes, please see the attached consent form. It will be explained that they are consenting to participating in the study and understand that the information they provide may be presented to further audiences in an aggregated format (i.e. there will be no risk of individual respondents being identified).	Yes ☒	No ☐
d. Is it clear to the participants / participating organisations and companies that they can withdraw from the study at any time? If yes, provide copies of documents where this is communicated to participants – see documents	Yes ☒	No ☐
e. Will participants / participating organisations and companies be fully debriefed after the research is completed? If yes, provide copies of participant debriefing documents	No X	
f. Have arrangements been made to ensure that material obtained from or about a participant remain confidential? Yes see documents	Yes ☒	No ☐
19. Will the research involve respondents to the internet or other visual / vocal methods where respondents may be identified?	Yes ☐	No ☒
20. Will research involve the sharing of data or confidential information beyond the initial consent given? If yes, provide details: No, data will only be made available to the researcher and supervisors	Yes ☐	No ☒
21. What measures have been made to ensure that any participants who are believed to be under some form of duress (eg. staff, students, prisoners, members of the armed forces, employees of companies sponsoring research) are not coerced into participating: Participants will be informed that they may withdraw at any time, with no fear of penalty for doing so. The results from the interviews will not be made available to others (and student participants will not be identified) until after their studies are completed. The researcher will not be able to influence students' performance and/or grades.		
Risk Management - Data collection		
22. Does the research involve use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument or measure? If yes, include copies or indicate if the questionnaire has not yet been developed yet.	Yes ☐	No ☒
23. Does the research involve use of written or computerised tests? If yes, include screen shots or indicate if the tests have not yet been developed yet.	Yes ☐	No ☒
24. Does the research involve use of interviews? If yes, include copies of interview questions or indicate if the questions have not yet been developed yet. Please refer to the attached interview topic guide. Specific questions are currently in development	Yes ☒	No ☐
25. Does the research involve diaries? If yes, include a copy of the diary record form or indicate if the diary record has not yet been developed yet.	Yes ☐	No ☒

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26. Does the research involve participant observation?	Yes ☐	No ☒
27. Does the research involve audio-recording interviewees or events (observation)?	Yes ☒	No ☐
28. Does the research involve video-recording (eg. CCTV, video etc) interviewees or events (observation)?	Yes ☐	No ☒
29. Will any people being observed and/or recorded not be informed that the observation and/or recording are taking place?	Yes ☐	No ☒
30. Does the research involve the deliberate deception of the participant?	Yes ☐	No ☒
31. Does the research involve the collection of confidential data and/or is there a risk that any participant could be identified from the data collected?	Yes ☐	No ☒
32. Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics? (e.g. sexual activity, drug use)	Yes ☐	No ☒
33. Are drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) to be administered to the study participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind?	Yes ☐	No ☒
34. Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?	Yes ☐	No ☒
35. Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?	Yes ☐	No ☒

36. What do you consider to be the main ethical issues which may arise from the proposed research and give full details of any hazards, pain, discomfort, distress, inconvenience or use of deception which could affect the health, safety or well-being of any participant, or any other person who might be affected by the research

> None

37. What levels of risk are associated with these hazards?

> N/A

38. How do you propose to control the risks associated with these hazards?

> N/A

39. What criteria have you used to determine whether the risks are acceptable?

> N/A

40. Is there any precedent for this research? If so, please give details with references if possible.		
Yes – some qualitative research has been conducted into aspects of student transition by the following: Tobbell et al., 2006, 2010; Lairio et al.,2013; Jackson et al, 2000; Pratt et al., 2006; Thomas & Quinn, 2006; Mirza, 2006, Thomas 2012; Brooks and Everett, 2008, Taylor and House, 2010. Their work has assisted in the development of the interview topic guide. Please see the attached.	Yes ☒	No ☐

41. What measures have been made for participants who might be vulnerable or might not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information given in English or have special communication needs (eg. translation, use of interpreters, use of chaperones, presence of guardians, researchers from same gender as participants etc):

> N/A

42. Is there the potential for adverse risks to the researchers themselves? (e.g. in international research: locally employed research assistants)	Yes ☐	No ☒
43. Having reflected upon the ethical implications of the project and/or its potential findings, do you believe that the research could be a matter of public controversy or have a negative impact on the reputation/standing of Aston University?	Yes ☐	No ☒

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44. How will the results be made available to participants and communities from which they are drawn?
On request via email

Risk management – Location

45. Location of research (enter details of all sites where research will take place and specify the elements of research to be undertaken at each site):
Aston University

46. Will the research take place outside of the UK? If yes, provide details and include copies of insurance documents:	Yes ☐ No ☒

Confidentiality and Data Protection

47. What measures have been put in place to ensure security and confidentiality of personal data and video/audio recordings?
Any electronic data will be password protected. Audio recorder will be kept in a lockable cupboard.

48. Where and by whom will the data be analysed?
At Aston University by Wendy Tabrizi

49. Who will have access to the data generated by the study?
Researcher only

50. When will personal data and any video/audio recordings be destroyed following completion of the research?
After 5 years

Peer review

How has the quality of the research been assessed?
By the PhD supervisory team and through the QR process

NHS related research

51. Will the research need to be reviewed by NHS NRES Committee or an external Ethics Committee? (if yes, please give brief details as an annex)	Yes ☐ No ☒
52. Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS or the use of NHS data premises and/or equipment?	Yes ☐ No ☒

Insurance

53. What arrangements have been made to provide indemnity and/or compensation in the event of a claim by, or on behalf of, participants for negligent and/or for non-negligent harm? Please note that you should not undertake to provide any form of indemnity or insurance cover without first referring the matter to the Deputy Director of Finance for her/his consideration.

Section 8 – Declaration by Applicant

The information contained above is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, accurate. I have read the University's Code of Practice for Ethical Standards for Research and accept responsibility for the conduct of the procedures set out in this application in accordance with the guidelines, and any other condition laid down by the University's Research Ethics Committee. I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research that may arise in conducting this research and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants.

I and my co-investigators or supporting staff have the appropriate qualifications, experience and facilities to conduct the research set out in the attached application and to deal with any emergencies and contingencies related to the research that may arise.

Signed:	Wendy Tabrizi	Date: 12.1.2017

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Section 9 – Signatories

To be completed by the Principal Investigator / Lead Researcher / Supervisor / Module Leader / Research Group Convenor / Research Ethics Committee Chair as applicable

Principal Investigator or Lead Researcher (where appropriate):			Date:
Supervisor or Module Leader (where appropriate):			Date:
Research Group Convenor (or nominee):			Date:
ABS Research Ethics Committee (Chair or nominee):			Date:

(Last updated November 2013)

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